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PRIVATE EYE

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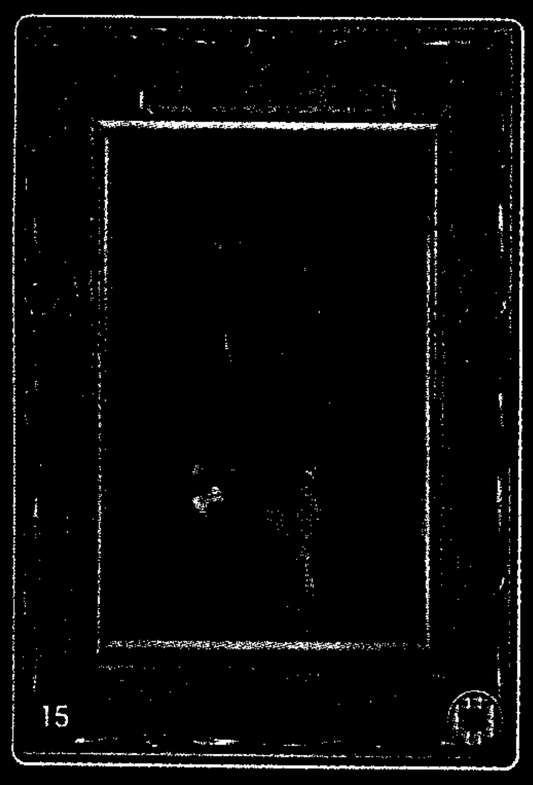

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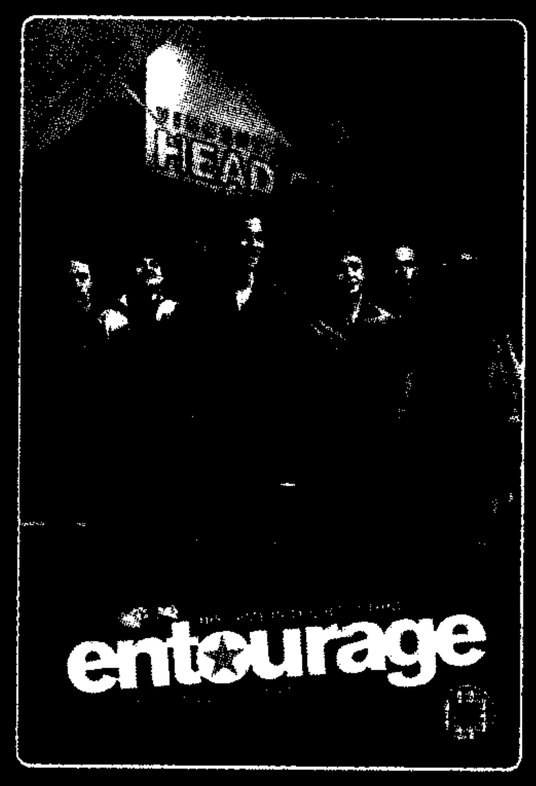

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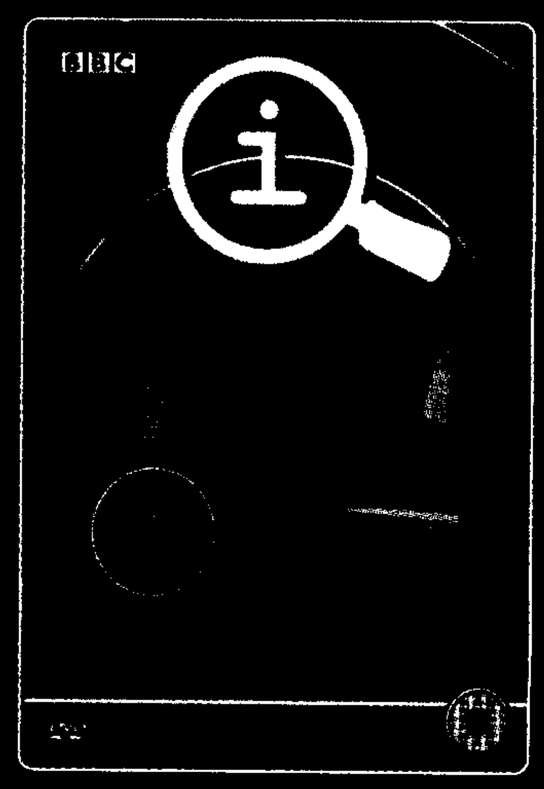

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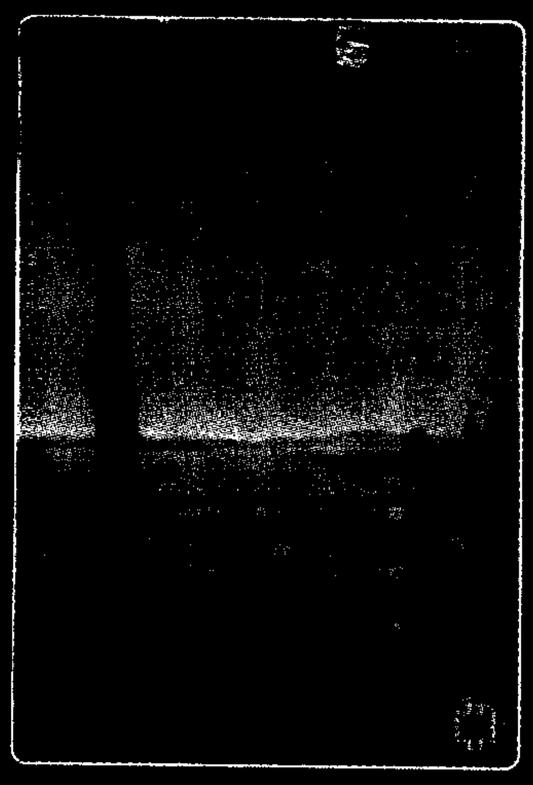

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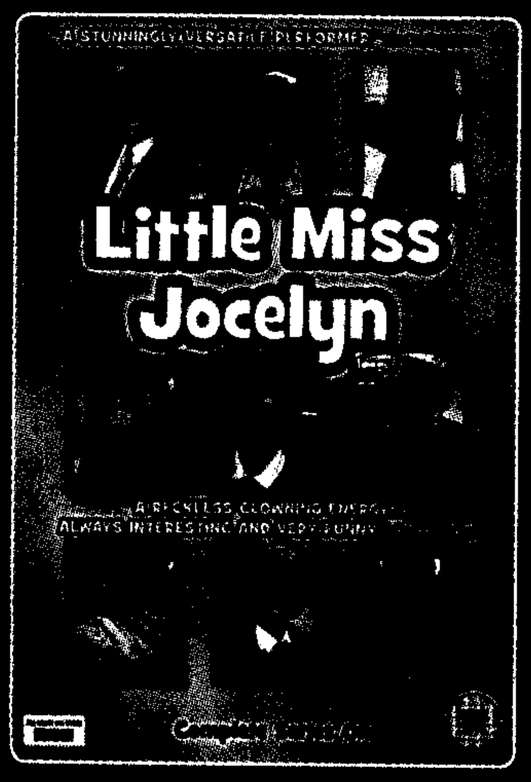

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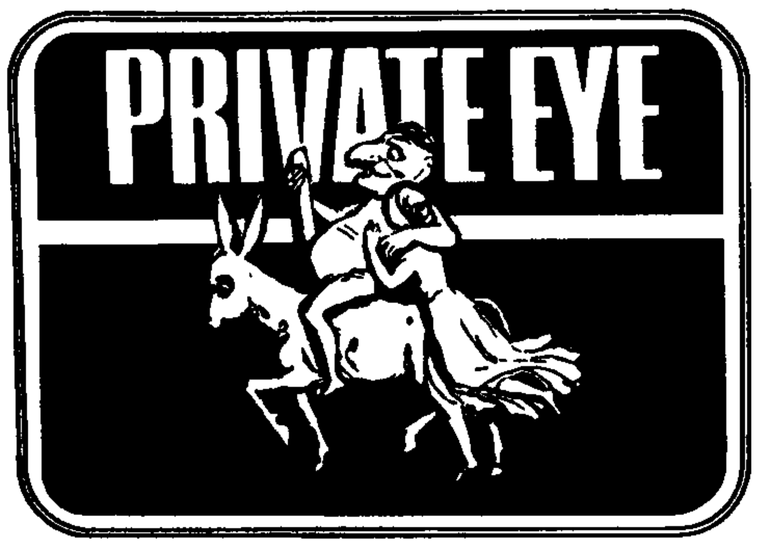

Putin the boot in

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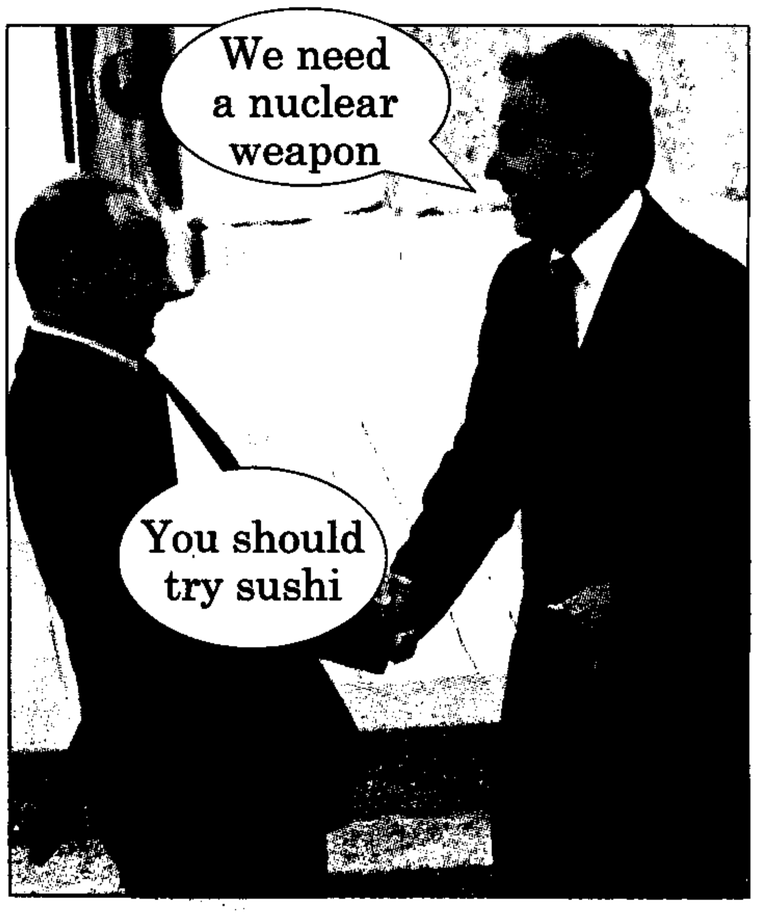
PRIVATE security companies are finding it less easy to make big profits as the "reconstruction" of Iraq winds down. Tim Spicer's Aegis Defence has an answer – the employment of carefully picked former British officers.

In September Brigadier Jim Baxter left his job as commander of the British military mission in Kuwait. This mission helps train the Kuwaiti army. Instability in the Middle East – not least in Iraq – gives the Kuwaitis a good reason to keep their forces in tip-top order.

During Brig. Baxter's time the military mission was cut by around 20 percent. Military sources in Kuwait tell the *Eye* that the future manning of the mission "is an ongoing discussion with the Kuwaitis". Aegis confirmed to the *Eye* that Brig. Baxter now works for them but would make "no further comment" on his new post – which observers believe is to head up an Aegis bid for... military training for the Kuwaiti army.

● *In the Back defence special – page 34.*

BLAIR BACKS TRIDENT



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ABC

WHEN British Energy appointed a new "chief nuclear officer" called Roy Anderson in 2004, *Private Eye* was alone in expressing scepticism. Anderson became a BE board member, hailed as a man with "significant experience of nuclear turnarounds".

As the *Eye* pointed out, (issue 1111), his experience was not so impressive. He came to Britain from an American firm called PSEG, which ran nuclear power plants in New Jersey. The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission expressed "concerns regarding the stations' ability to effectively address potential safety issues", and noted "low to moderately serious" violations and an "ineffective" response by management. Dr Kymn Harvin, a whistleblower from the plant, told the *Eye* that Anderson had allowed her to be sacked and got rid of other staff instead of "focusing on the safety and work environment issues".

This month Anderson left British Energy "with immediate effect" and with no job to go to, after the firm admitted cracks in pipes would keep their "fleet" of atomic stations partly out of action until 2008. The "turnaround" expert has turned around, it seems, and gone. While Anderson has developed an ugly mark on his CV, Dr Harvin was given an award by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers for the courage and sacrifice of her whistleblowing.

●***Private Eye* was also concerned when the government manoeuvred Sir Adrian Montague into the chairman's seat at British Energy in 2002, given his long association with schemes to transfer public money into the private sector (the first rail privatization, PFI). The government handed BE a massive loan when it persuaded the firm to take on Sir Adrian. Now thanks to the cracking pipes, British Energy has more financial troubles and the government's plans to sell its stake and get its cash back have been delayed "until further notice".**

THE government's main IT supplier, EDS, has finally admitted what *Private Eye* readers have known for years – that they're crap.

An internal document prepared by managers last month and seen by the *Eye* identifies five big problems facing the company, including: "the focus on cutting costs is driving down project quality"; "our need for more training drives down project quality and market competitiveness"; and "conflicting expectations and lack of coordination between sales and applications".

In other words, in an effort to boost profits by cutting costs and selling systems without getting the technicalities right, the company has been screwing up all round. Tax credit claimants, Child Support Agency "customers" and many others have suspected this for years, but it's nice to see the company finally recognising it. But will government departments currently still queuing up to give the company work, notably the Ministry of Defence, take any notice?

THE CBI's annual whinge-fest, aka conference, yet again produced a spurious survey to back its campaign for tax cuts just before the Chancellor's pre-budget report next week. And yet again its claims went largely unchallenged.

This time the lobby group revealed that three-quarters of business leaders thought the corporate tax regime had got worse for them in the past five years. In fact, recent government figures show that under Labour, corporate tax bills rose by just 14 percent up to 2004/05, while buried in the Office of National Statistics' "Blue Book" is the information that corporate profits ballooned by 39 percent. Even with higher company tax receipts predicted to emerge for the last tax year, there remains a significant shortfall, thanks largely to several new forms of tax relief and more expert corporate "tax planning".

Clear winners in the New Labour tax stakes are inevitably the bankers, for whom tax dodging is a way of life. They paid £230m less tax in 2004/05 than they did in 1996/97, while their profits roughly trebled to not far off £50bn.

Oddly, none of these numbers cropped up in the CBI survey.

IT COMES as no surprise that the Hong Kong-based owners of Battersea power station have suddenly sold the site to another developer for some £400m – 40 times what they paid for it 13 years ago.

As long ago as 1997 *Eye* 922 cast doubt on whether Parkview International and its president Victor Hwang ever had any intention of restoring the redundant and culpably neglected site, but English Heritage and Wandsworth council chose to believe in them.

No doubt they will now ensure that the new Irish owners actually do something – and perhaps question whether the famous chimneys really must be replaced by replicas.

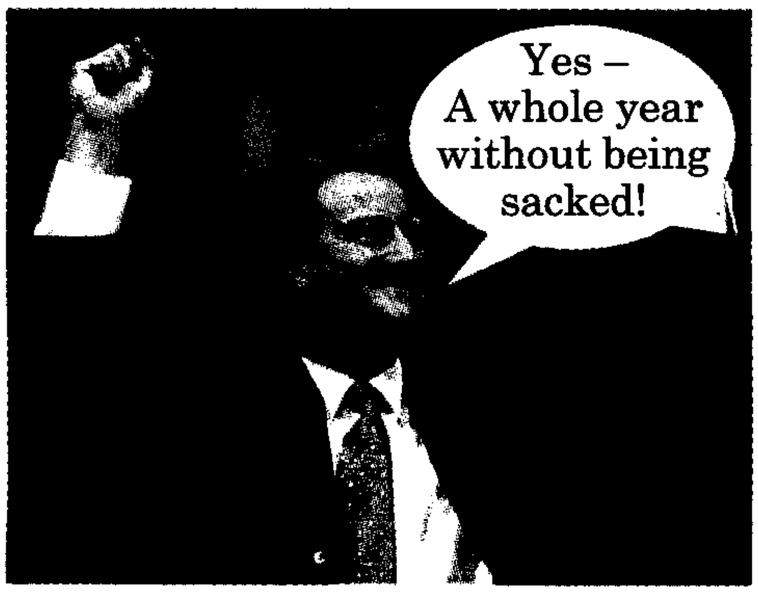
● *More Nooks & Corners, page 14.*

JOINED-UP OPPOSITION

23 November: Conservative party launches "inner tosser" advertising campaign to persuade young people that getting into debt is a bad idea

28 November: Conservative party reveals to Electoral Commission that it owes £35,315,060 to 62 creditors

CAMERON'S TRIUMPH



ANGLO-RUSSIAN relations haven't been so delicate since May 1989, when the Soviets expelled 11 British diplomats and hacks in retaliation for Britain kicking out 11 Russians. And there's a curious link between the two crises.

The most high-profile victim in 1989 was Angus Roxburgh, Moscow correspondent of the *Sunday Times*. The KGB summoned a press conference to accuse him of trying to recruit a Soviet citizen to spy on government installations. "To this end, the foreigner [Roxburgh] gave him equipment for listening and recording telephone conversations, and also promised to pay a monetary reward for information that was interesting to him."

Nonsense, retorted Roxburgh. "The KGB, which had its agents follow me around conspicuously last week in their leather jackets and greasy ties, is probably the last anachronism in Russia," he wrote, "and my expulsion is just one small example of its enormous power over other institutions."

But, he added, things were changing: "The KGB's immunity from criticism has ended." He expected to return soon to a Russia where the intelligence apparatus had been "cut down to size".

He has indeed returned, but to a country ruled by a former KGB man whose agents are accused of bumping off dissidents. If Roxburgh has any criticisms, however, he keeps them to himself. A few months ago the American PR agency Ketchum was paid £4m by President Putin to improve his international image – and one of the main advisers hired for the task is none other than Angus Roxburgh!

Embarrassingly for Downing Street, another British spin-doctor now taking the Putin rouble is Tim Allan, Alastair Campbell's former sidekick at No 10. It was he who arranged for the *Sun* to run a "historic message" from the Russian president on the eve of the G8 summit this summer. ("World Exclusive … Vladimir Putin today promises *Sun* readers he will always back Britain in the war on terror.")

Allan is well used to working for creepy megalomaniacs. His company Portland PR also acts for the Dirty Digger's Sky TV.

WITH THE list of *dramatis personae* in the Litvinenko affair swelling daily, it was inevitable that the Yukos oil company would soon find itself back in the news.

Alas, the Yukos brand is being mentioned alongside polonium-210 poisonings, a mysterious illness in Ireland, a car smash in France, the shooting of a journalist in Moscow, a fatal helicopter crash and so on. In the enforced absence of the company's founder Mikhail Khodorkovsky, (currently serving nine years' hard labour in Siberia for tax evasion and fraud), Yukos has remained silent on this disturbing chain of events.

Surely this is a chance for Lord Owen, aka Dr Death, to step forward and say a few words?

In January 2003, *Business Week* magazine reported that Yukos had just "paid $150 million for a controlling stake in Lithuania's Mazheikiu Nafta refinery. The secret to that deal was political finesse. Ex-British foreign secretary David Owen, chairman of Yukos's international division, met personally with Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus to vouch for Yukos as a transparent, profit-oriented, long-term investor." Owen told the magazine that "they didn't want the refinery to become Russian-owned until they were convinced they had nothing to fear".

Leaving aside how the Lithuanians feel about Yukos or Owen now (and especially his assurances that Putin was a man they should do business with), surely Dr Death – who has presumably been working quietly behind the scenes to secure Khodorkovsky's release – must now go public with a demand for Putin to explain just what's going on.

MORE evidence emerges of underhand tactics from Royal Mail in its efforts to shut down post offices.

When the sub-postmistress in Lawrenny, Pembrokeshire, resigned recently Royal Mail took the opportunity to close the 80-year-old post office, claiming that nobody wanted to take it over. Not so, replied locals. One of them, the manager of the nearby youth hostel, had immediately registered interest in the job. The closure notice slapped on the post office was hastily amended with a black marker pen to delete the lie that nobody could be found to run it.

Royal Mail now claims that the outlet is uneconomical. Locals dispute this, but in any case they should have been consulted. Instead a letter was sent to the council announcing the "temporary closure" and a replacement mobile service, present in the village for one hour a week.

All is not lost, however, as campaigners and local Labour MP Nick Ainger have managed to persuade Royal Mail's network development *(sic)* manager down to Pembrokeshire to listen to locals' plans for their post office – something that might have been worth doing in the first place, instead of trying to sneak through the demise of yet another rural post office.

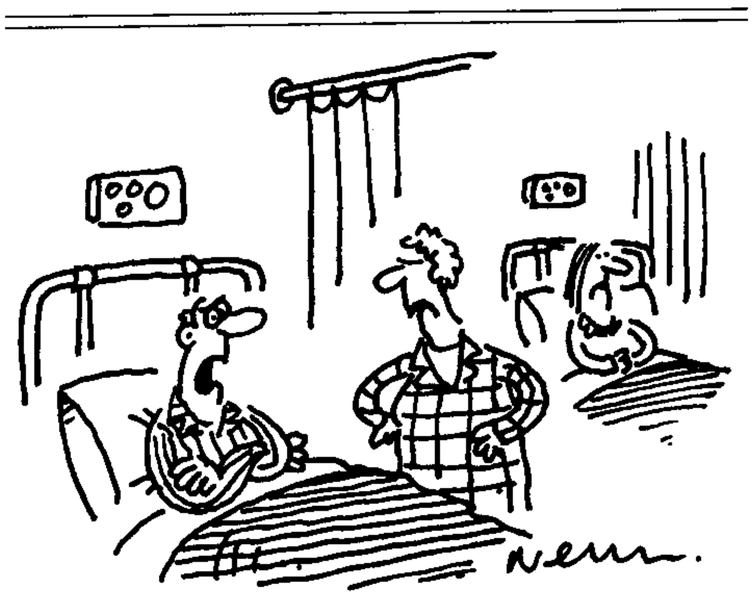
"DON'T follow the herd", "Who are they kidding?" "Not the great gift you think" – the start of the Christmas shopping season saw a flurry of hand-wringing headlines suggesting that "fashionable" charity gifts such as giving goats do more harm than good.

The stories followed accusations from charities Animal Aid and the World Land Trust, which has been running its "Don't send a cow" campaign since 2004, saying that schemes run by Oxfam (www.oxfamunwrapped.com), Christian Aid (www.presentaid.org) and others are "madness" and add to the problems of poor people.

It is also claimed that gift goats lead to desertification. The only evidence cited is a *New Scientist* article from 2001 mentioning over-grazing as a hazard in some regions (it also talks about farmers reclaiming desert using animal manure, so it's hardly a clincher). Oxfam, however, explains that it only provides animals to communities where they are a traditional or essential part of their way of life: "The impact on natural resources is always considered … with proper management animals can be raised without environmental degradation." Christian Aid makes it clear that, rather than flooding the world with goats, it provides them where needed but may use the money for other agriculture projects.

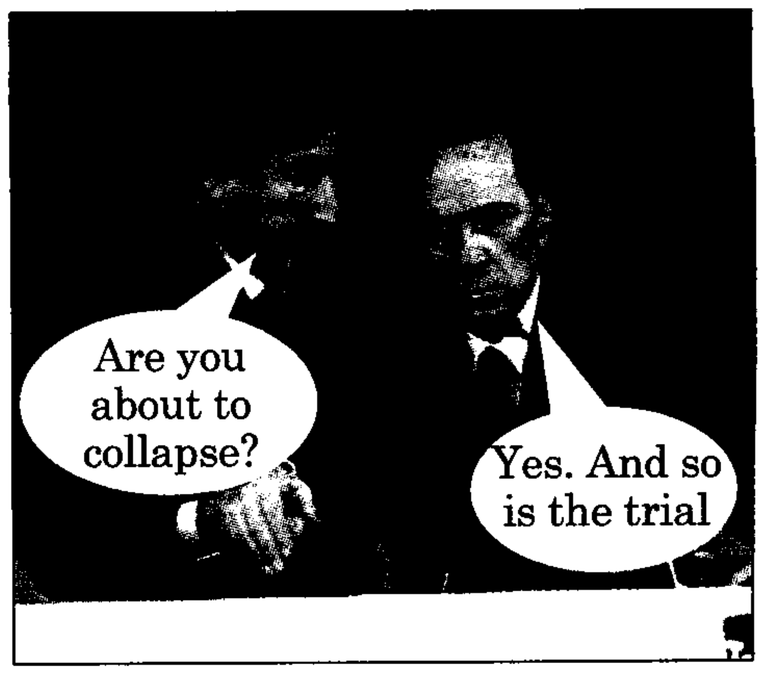
Animal Aid is not, in fact, an aid charity and has no experience of providing aid to poor communities. It is an animal rights group, campaigning against animal testing: "If you really care about animals, the best way you can help is to stop eating them!" Perhaps not the best people to be lecturing on livestock farming in the developing world.

And the World Land Trust? Despite the grand title it is a small conservation charity in Halesworth, Suffolk, raising funds for land purchase schemes around the world and offering "an acre of rainforest" as the ideal gift.



"Of course I'm sleeping with another woman—I'm in a hospital ward!"

BERLUSCONI FAINTS



WITH Cafcass, the children and family court advisory service, having to get by on a frozen budget as hundreds of children face delays in their cases coming to court, frontline staff were angry to hear that the entire senior management team had taken off for a couple of days at a health spa in Leicestershire.

Twenty-four managers went on the two-day "training" session at Champneys, hoping to emerge "fitter for business" (geddit?). It was, according to a spokesman, the first training session senior staff had had in the two years since Cafcass's new chief executive, Anthony Douglas, had taken over, and the cost – around £6,500 – was no more than any other reasonable hotel.

While the spokesman agreed there were still some delays in children's cases, Cafcass was now dealing with far more cases a year. He said that a paper was being produced as a result of the Champneys experience that would see even more efficiencies. That will no doubt boost the senior managers' productivity bonuses – last year about £11,200 for Douglas.

"MORE needs to be done – and swiftly – to reduce the number of secondary schools found to be inadequate," declared Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, in Ofsted's annual report last week.

"What should be done?" mused Ms Gilbert in the report's introduction. "I am convinced that we can climb above the present plateau in results through sensitive and shrewd focus on the needs of each individual."

In a previous life Ms Gilbert was chief executive of Tower Hamlets council in east London. Under her watch the borough rose above its "plateau" in GCSE results to become the most improved education authority in Britain. At the Sir John Cass Foundation and Red Coat school in Stepney, in the space of a year, the number of pupils achieving five or more A-C grade GCSEs rose from 39 per cent to 69 per cent, making it the most improved school in the country.

The secret of the miracle cure? All Sir John Cass students sat a GNVQ in science – which counted as *four* A-C grade GCSEs. If they took just one GCSE in addition they would be deemed to have "achieved" the coveted five A-Cs!

Whether Ms Gilbert's new "relentless focus on the individual" will lead her to take a dim view of anyone else's five GCSEs-for-the-price-of-one deals, is yet to be seen.

CORRECTION OF THE WEEK

"Despite our Observer Food Monthly recipe for Christmas plum cake (last week) repeating the claim from The Duchy Originals Cookbook that it is 'nutless', readers with allergies need to beware, as almonds are listed in the ingredients."

– Observer.

Street of Shame

THE past month has been deeply embarrassing for the Dirty Digger. First came the revelation that Murdoch had paid £1.8m to O.J. Simpson for a hypothetical murder confession. This was swiftly followed by the conviction of Clive Goodman, royal editor of the *News of the Screws*, for illegally tapping into the mobile phones of ministers, royal aides and celebs.

"As the editor of the newspaper, I take ultimate responsibility for the conduct of my reporters," said *Screws* editor Andy Coulson. But in fact he appears to be shrugging off responsibility, by implying that neither he nor anyone else at the *Screws* had the slightest inkling of what Goodman was up to. "Clive Goodman's actions were entirely wrong and I have put in place measures to ensure that they will not be repeated by any member of my staff."

Surely there were "measures in place" already? Glenn "Trigger" Mulcaire, the private detective who carried out the bugging for Goodman, is said to have earned £200,000 a year from the *Screws* over the past three years, plus undisclosed cash payments. Fees on such a scale would have to be authorised by Coulson or one of his senior executives. Yet they would have us believe it never occurred to them to ask why the sleazy "Trigger" merited such largesse. There are only two possible explanations: either they're lying, or they're recklessly negligent.

And what of the five additional charges brought against Mulcaire, that he unlawfully intercepted voicemail message meant for publicist Max Clifford, the footballer Sol Campbell's agent Sky Andrew, Professional Footballers' Association chairman Gordon Taylor, MP Simon Hughes and model Elle Macpherson, between February 16 and June 16 this year?

During those four months Campbell's club Arsenal agreed to accept offers on the player (a "football sensation" revealed exclusively beneath the headline "Arsenal tell Sol: We don't want you" on 28 May in *The News of the World*). Elle Macpherson was revealed to be dating property developer John Hitchcox (as exclusively reported in *The News of the World*, which also managed to "quash rumours that Elle had dated England star Sol Campbell"). Max Clifford was refusing to speak to Andy Coulson following a falling-out over his cocaine-fan client Kerry Katona, or give the *NoW* any of the lucrative stories he had previously handed over on a plate. Among the 14 other targets whose names the judge ordered to be left on file is believed to be Rebekah Wade, *Sun* editor Coulson's friendly rival down the corridor and competitor for scoops.

The Digger is no doubt delighted!

"Off with his Ed"

THE Goodman case was the cue for some massive humbug elsewhere in the Street.

The *Daily Mail* crowed that "his hunger for scoops could well earn him a prison sentence, as well as ending his Fleet Street career… Goodman went from school straight into the *Kentish Times* local newspapers group … he began working weekend shifts for national newspapers, and eventually secured a six-month contract as a diary reporter, tunnelling out gossip from society events".

Why was the *Mail* so reticent about naming the paper which gave Goodman his Fleet Street break and taught him his "tunnelling out" skills? Could it be because it was the *Daily Mail*, where he was a young protégé of Nigel Dempster?

Meanwhile the *Grauniad*'s Polly Toynbee was mightily peeved that, although Goodman might well go to jail, his guilty plea had "stopped anything coming out in court".

"The criminal's fence is also usually arrested for handling stolen goods," fumed Polly. "Could there be any more obvious case than the publication in broad daylight of the proceeds of this crime? Yet no inspector has called to feel the collar of Rupert Murdoch… Not even the offending *News of the World* editor has felt the hot breath of the law. The best measure would have been to lock him up – and his owner too. That would have caused a real newspaper shock, since the information commissioner recently found one private detective snooping on behalf of 300 journalists from all kinds of media organisations."

Indeed he did – and on Monday one hack 'fessed up. "I've used some of those questionable methods myself over the years. I, too, once listened to the mobile phone messages of a corrupt arms company executive … There is certainly a voyeuristic thrill in hearing another person's private messages," wrote David Leigh, investigations editor of… *The Guardian*.

DAVID Cameron's new best friend Polly Toynbee was in strident form last week as she lambasted "explosive boardroom pay increases and bonuses [which] distort pay structures, fracturing any sense of proportion or just reward" in the *Grauniad*. She was particularly incensed by CEOs who "helped themselves to 30 percent more this year, while their directors took 28 percent (against an average pay rise of 2.8 percent)".

This must have made uncomfortable reading for one corporation where boardroom pay was up 37 percent last year despite losses of nearly £50m, and where one executive pocketed a special £75,000 bonus plus a £172,000 pension contribution, despite his costly relaunch having little effect on sales. Only a paltry 3 percent pay increase for the firm's footsoldiers was enough to avert a strike.

And who were these symbols of capitalist greed? The Guardian Media Group, owners of the *Grauniad*, and the paper's editor Alan Rusbridger.

ON THE first anniversary of the extension of alcohol licensing hours, the *Daily Mail* worked itself up into a lather by reprinting an article from the *New Statesman* that warned of "a growing disaster" as a result of the change in legislation.

Most worryingly, "a third of all 24-hour licences granted were given to supermarkets, where alcohol is cheapest. It is not surprising, then, that consumption outside licensed premises is on the rise." The *Mail* chided "the drinks industry [for] doing what it has always done: trying to maximise its sales."

One way that supermarkets and drink companies seek to maximise sales is through advertising. And what appeared in the same edition of the *Mail*? An ad for Morrisons, promoting crates of Carling lager at a knock-down price!

Dictionerys also available at silly prices

Cotswold Bookstore advertisement

Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat

"KILLER PLAGUES" screamed the *Sun* over a calm and rational editorial on the "migrants' Aids epidemic threat" to Britain.

"The problem is set to hit crisis point when Romania and Bulgaria – nations with some of Europe's highest Aids rates – join the EU next year. Workers from these countries are expected to flood into Britain," the paper warned.

According to the latest statistics released by the Joint United Nations project on HIV/Aids, the estimated adult HIV prevalence in both Bulgaria and Romania is less than 0.1% – the lowest rate recorded anywhere in Europe and Central Asia. While there are currently 59,000 HIV-positive residents of the UK, the number of Bulgarians living with HIV is estimated at "less than 500".

"FROM TODAY THERE IS NO HIDING PLACE", shrieked page 2 of the *Sun* on 17 November, above the news that a new government-funded website was naming and shaming "wanted paedos". "Five perverts who vanished after leaving prison are today the first to be named," the paper revealed. "Visitors will NOT be able to read details of the sex beasts' crimes."

One thing they could have read in that day's *Sun*, however, was agony aunt Deidre's photo casebook, which opened with a full-length snap of "Pippa" wearing a lacy black bra and knickers while musing on how her life was changing now that "I'm not under-age any more".

BACK in January *Eye* 1150 noted what we reckoned to be the most pathetic tabloid story in history – the *Sun* front page which revealed that "lotto rapist" Iorworth Hoare, who bought a winning lottery ticket while on weekend leave from jail in 2004, had moved into a house a few streets away from footballer Alan Shearer.

We have since have to revise that opinion, following the *Sun*'s scoop of 22 November: "Rapist in owl fright". It told how "A giant owl with a 6ft wingspan is terrorising Lotto rapist Iorworth Hoare's neighbourhood."

While the paper noted that the European Eagle owl "has a deep hoot" and "can kill dogs and small deer", it was unable to find any evidence that Hoare had ever encountered the terrifying creature. There is as we go to press no word as to the safety of Alan Shearer.

JOINED-UP OPPOSITION

23 November: Conservative party launches "inner tosser" advertising campaign to persuade young people that getting into debt is a bad idea

28 November: Conservative party reveals to Electoral Commission that it owes £35,315,060 to 62 creditors

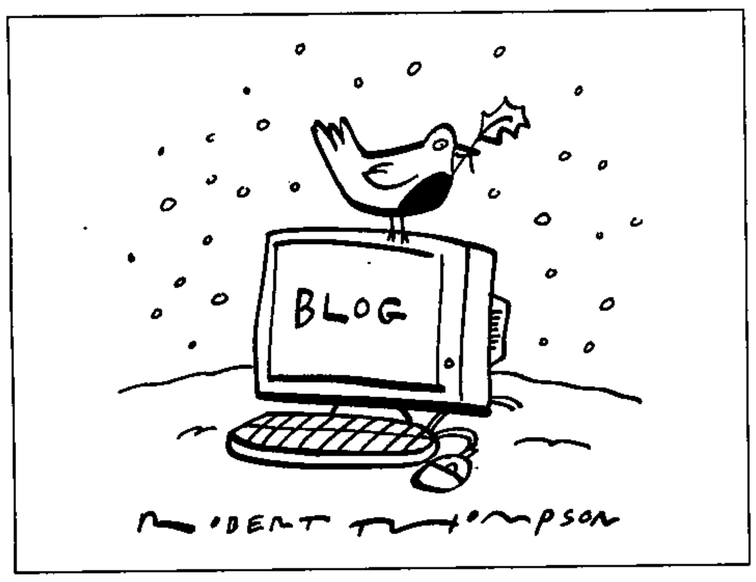
EXPRESS chairman Richard Desmond's Christmas "bash" got off to a thumping good start. As his chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce swung into Kingly Street in the West End, its headlights illuminated two figures brawling in the gutter.

The pair – both senior Northern and Shell advertising executives – carried on trading punches as their supremo stepped over them and into the Tantra Club for a night of revelry. The doorman entered the fray to try and break things up but ended up with a broken nose himself. Whether their fighting qualities have assured their futures or ended them is not yet known.

Dirty Des recovered from the violent scenes to deliver a speech focussing mainly on how much charitable work he has performed over the last 12 months. Sadly a lot of hacks on the titles were not there to hear it: they were enjoying their own Xmas knees-up in a pub around the corner as a protest against his charitable decision to make 55 of them redundant.

JUST how hard are times at the *Daily Star*, the paper owned by multimillionaire Richard Desmond, where 10 per cent of the staff are being axed so that the boss can continue to have his butler bring him a banana on a silver salver each morning?

Last month, as the canteen on the ninth floor started charging staff for cups of hot water to put their own teabags in, one of the *Star*'s staff went into hospital for an operation. She received a beautiful bunch of flowers from her colleagues – courtesy of the Interflora press office, who the paper's news desk had been forced to call in a desperate attempt to blag a free bouquet.



TONY Livesey quit as editor-in-chief of those learned journals the *Daily* and *Sunday Sport* three months ago, to pursue a career in radio and TV. Last week he asked if he could attend the papers' Christmas bash at the Lowry centre in Salford – only to be briskly rebuffed by office manager Andrea Fickling.

Adding insult to injury, *Sunday Sport* editor Paul Carter has recently printed several "readers' letters" saying how much better the rag has become over the past three months and innocently inquiring if there's a new hand on the tiller.

IN JUNE 2005, sacked *Mirror* editor Piers Moron made his return as a major Fleet Street figure by buying the journalists' trade mag *Press Gazette* with his PR man chum Matthew Freud.

In February *Press Gazette* described the up-coming launch of "Britain's first daily newspaper for gamblers", *The Sportsman,* as "a dead cert".

April brought a front page splash detailing another launch, the *North West Enquirer,* a Manchester-based weekly which *Press Gazette* predicted would pull in "an up-market readership across Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire… with a classic, yet modern look."

The *Sportsman* went into administration in July and closed in October. The *North West Enquirer* went out of business in September. And in November *Press Gazette* itself went into administration and closed down.

Morgan, sadly, is believed personally to have lost around a quarter of a million pounds.

HACKWATCH

Russian to judgment

"THE mystery surrounding the poisoned Russian spy, Alexander Litvinenko, deepened yesterday when the consultant caring for him said the cause of his condition may never be known." – *Guardian*, 22 November.

"While the exact nature of the poison used on Alexander Litvinenko remains undetermined, some of its lethal effects are suggestive of radioactive thallium." – Dr Tom Stuttaford, *Times*, 22 November.

"Geoff Bellingan, director of critical care at University College Hospital, said that doctors were now convinced that the cause was not a heavy metal such as thallium, as originally suspected. Nor had he swallowed any mystery objects. 'Radiation poisoning is also unlikely,' he said." – *Times*, 24 November.

☘

"He was killed by polonium 210, a rare radioactive isotope which is so toxic that there may never be a post-mortem examination of Mr Litvinenko's body, for fear of causing further deaths." – *Guardian*, 25 November.

"The family will be given the body after a post-mortem examination due to be carried out today… Experts insist that the chances of contamination being spread by the body are 'remote'." – *Times*, 1 December.

☘

"So how did the former intelligence agent come to ingest the lethal dose of polonium?… Once it is absorbed by the body, the metal is said to be several million times more deadly than cyanide." – *Independent on Sunday*, 26 November.

"Mr Litvinenko died a week ago after ingesting a dose of radioactive polonium 210, a toxin 250 billion times deadlier than cyanide." – *Daily Mail*, 30 November.

☘

"There is no reason to beat about the bush. This attempted murder, for that is surely what it is, bears all the hallmarks of the Russian security services, the FSB. Thallium, without taste and fatal in even tiny quantities, is the secret services' drug of choice." – *Independent*, 21 November.

"Officers believe it is possible Mr Litvinenko was the victim of an attempted 'contract killing' by a criminal gang. He once turned supergrass to tip off police in Italy about a Ukrainian arms smuggling racket." – *Daily Mail*, 22 November.

"Detectives investigating the death of Alexander Litvinenko are examining the possibility that the former spy killed himself to discredit Russian President Vladimir Putin." – *Independent on Sunday*, 26 November.

"Could it be suicide? Was this a desperate final act of a man marginalised by the mainstream for whom his anti-Kremlin message depended on the oxygen of publicity?" – *Observer*, 26 November.

"Others wondered whether he was the victim of a mafia plot. Had he somehow come into contact with smuggled radioactive material?" – *Sunday Times*, 26 November.

"Today the *News of the World* unmasks the hitman at the centre of the shock poison murder of former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko. He is a 46-year-old trained assassin we can legally name only as Igor." – *News of the World*, 26 November.

"The former Russian spy who died last week from radiation poisoning named a senior Kremlin agent as the man he believed responsible for targeting him. Alexander Litvinenko… named the agent in charge of monitoring him as 'Viktor Kirov'." – *Sunday Times*, 26 November.

"The Kremlin mounted a concerted campaign yesterday to point the finger of suspicion at the billionaire businessman Boris Berezovsky over the death of his friend, Alexander Litvinenko." – *Times*, 29 November.

"Former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko feared he had been poisoned by Italian academic Mario Scaramella, it was revealed yesterday." – *Sun*, 29 November.

"Arsenal last night declined to comment in response to suggestions that the club's Emirates Stadium had been visited by police investigating the poisoning of the former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko." – *Guardian*, 1 December.

☘

"Experts say this was not an amateur crime. Polonium cannot be obtained on the Web." – *Independent on Sunday*, 26 November.

"The radioactive poison used to kill the former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko is being offered for sale over the internet for less than £40." – *Times*, 30 November.

THE *Sunset Times* has welcomed back its chief sports writer, David Walsh, who quit the job in January to spend more time working on a biography of his chum Kieren Fallon, the former champion jockey.

Already banned in Britain over race-fixing allegations which will see him spending more time in court than on the race course next year, last week Fallon was banned from riding worldwide following a positive drug test for cocaine. His riding career seems to be well and truly over.

Walsh, by contrast, has renewed his career where it left off, with a hefty six-figure salary. Remarkably generous, given that Walsh's previous bequest to the paper was a libel action from cyclist Lance Armstrong over accusations of drug-taking. The case was settled in July, at considerable expense to the *Sunday Times*.

MIHIR BOSE, the sports hack for whom the Private I-I-I column might have been invented, was in fine form in his last *Telegraph* column before setting off for the BBC.

It was a story about West Ham's desire to move into the new Olympic stadium, punctuated with familiar Bose phrases such as "the *Daily Telegraph* can reveal" and "speaking to me just hours before the meeting…"

A farewell scoop, then? Not quite. The whole story had been on the Press Association sports wire the previous afternoon.

FORMER *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* hack George Trefgarne recently quit Fleet Street to accept a well-paid job as speechwriter to BP's chief executive Lord Browne.

Connoisseurs of Trefgarne's recent output may not have been entirely surprised. On 13 October the *Mail* ran an adoring defence of Browne, saying it was monstrous that his enemies within BP (i.e. the "portly" chairman Peter Sutherland) should be suggesting Browne was past it. The piece hailed Browne as "a business genius", "exquisite", an "extraordinary man", and attributed many of BP's successes in recent years to his "brilliance".

The author of this encomium? Step forward George Trefgarne!

Number crunchings

£18m

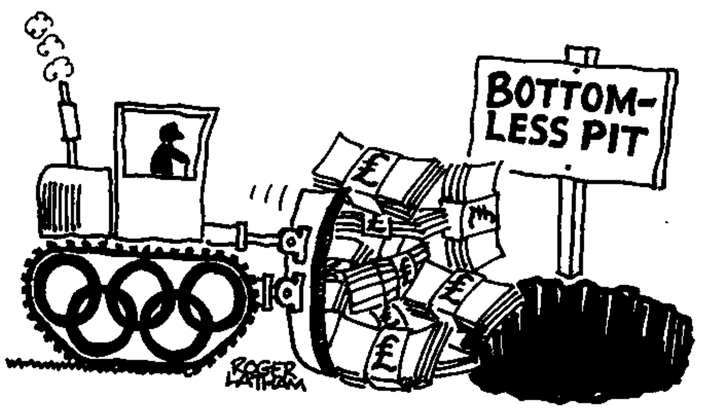
- Amount raised by BBC for Children in Need
- Amount spent by BBC to keep Jonathan Ross

WHAT exactly is the Smith Institute – the think tank that's acting as Gordon's brains trust in his run-up to power and which is currently being hauled over the coals by the Charity Commission for apparently overstepping the mark?

The institute certainly has impeccable Brownite credentials: led by Brown buddy Wilf Stevenson, it gave a job to Brown aide Ed Balls before he was parachuted back into parliament, and has held around half of its most recent thirty seminars in 11 Downing Street. Finances have improved too since Brown came closer to the top job: of £2 million raised since 1998, £500,000 has come in during the last reported year.

So what kind of companies back the Chancellor's brains? Unlike some Blairite think tanks, the Smith Institute does not publish a list of its corporate backers, but firms given thanks for recent support suggest Gordon attracts the same kind of corporate cash as Tony. Earlier this year, drinks-maker Diageo paid for a Smith Institute book on business ethics, including an essay by its chief executive claiming that "promoting responsible drinking is at the heart of our strategy". That's not what the Advertising Standards Authority said this September when it ruled that Diageo's ad campaign to promote one of its alcopops – featuring a wacky Uri and his homeboy Gorb in their igloo – was a "juvenile" attempt to "appeal to adolescents' sense of humour" by aping youth TV. It banned the ads; Diageo is appealing.

The Smith Institute has other corporate friends. The Royal Bank of Canada, a PFI investor, funded the institute's work on PFI, and work on "improving competitiveness" was sponsored by EDS, BAA and British Gas – companies noted either for some high profile failures or a tendency to monopoly. Meanwhile it is "rethinking social housing" with money from the Grainger Trust, one of Britain's largest private landlords. Grainger did little social housing until earlier this year when it bought around a thousand "social" properties from the Church of England over protests by Labour MPs Kate Hoey and Harriet Harman. It also faced protests when it imposed 30 percent rent rises in 2002 after buying housing association properties around Birmingham. The Smith Institute published a paper by Grainger chief executive Rupert Dickinson where the £561,000-a-year housing boss asked for more money, saying, "it is clear that some kind of new fiscal instrument is needed to motivate private sector provision of rented housing". Presumably a "fiscal instrument" in addition to rent, the normal motivation for landlords.



Construction starts for 'London 2012'

CALLED TO ORDURE

SOME 290 Labour MPs went mooing through the lobbies to push the Fraud (Trials Without a Jury) Bill through the Commons. During the long debate preceding the vote, however, the government benches were almost deserted.

Just two ministers and two Labour backbenchers spoke in support of a Bill which rips the guts out of the jury principle and demolishes centuries of legal history. Everyone else present, including some of the House's most experienced lawyers, was dubious about the proposal.

The debate, held in prime time on a Wednesday afternoon, was opened by solicitor-general Mike O'Brien, sporting a new "Caesar" haircut. O'Brien's ministerial career has taken years to recover from being caught up in the Hinduja affair, when his evidence contributed to Peter Mandelson's second resignation. The Fraud (Trial Without Juries) debate gave O'Brien a chance to show he is, despite everything, a New Labour team player. He duly seized it.

The government's case was built on the argument that fraud cases take too long for juries to endure, sometimes lasting six months or longer. One answer to this might be for judges to tell lawyers not to drag the arguments out for so long (the longer a case lasts, the higher the legal fees). Or the Lord Chancellor's department could tell the Serious Farce Office to lift its game. But no, O'Brien concluded instead that juries were the expendable part of the equation.

Fraud trials, he said, involve "multiple defendants and the discussion of complex issues". Philip Davies (Con, Shipley) asked if the government was saying it thought juries were too thick to understand fraud cases. "That is not our claim," insisted a deeply shocked O'Brien.

Tory frontbencher Dominic Grieve said juries cope perfectly well with masses of technical detail at other trials involving, for instance, health and safety rules. O'Brien, by way of reply, said that the proportion of cases affected by this Bill was tiny. "We want to ensure that 99.9 per cent of cases tried in the Crown court will continue to be tried by a jury."

If this is true, why go to such time and trouble to change the law? Several MPs feared a nasty precedent was being set. O'Brien declared that there were no plans "at this stage" to do away with juries in other types of trial. "At this stage!" snorted opponents of the Bill. O'Brien later insisted there were no plans, full stop, but by now the House was sucking a lemon and looking distinctly sceptical.

The two backbenchers to support the Bill were former *Observer* journalist Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme), whose claimed expertise was that his first assignment as a hack was to cover the Blue Arrow fraud trial, and West Wirral's Stephen Hesford. Who he? Hesford is a little-known barrister who has languished unrewarded on the back benches since 1997. He stands a good chance of being beaten at the next election by the Tories' TV star candidate Esther McVey. It could be a case of "become a minister in the next few months" or never.

Hesford expressed disbelief that any British judge could be open to corruption. Bob Marshall-Andrews (Lab, Medway) had made the well-established argument that jury trials prevent judges being nobbled. This has, by long custom, been one of the great justifications for jury trials. Hesford loftily said that this was "fatuous", "not worthy of debate", "a thoroughly bad point". He declined to address the argument. Edward Garnier, for the Tories, said hold on, you can't just insult an argument. You should take it on. Meet it with an opposing argument. Hesford crossly declined to do so. He later explained his support for jury-free trials by using the precedent of the (much hated) Diplock courts of Northern Ireland. Great!

Marshall-Andrews rubbished the theory that juries were hard to find for fraud trials. The only thing about them was that given the length of time trials could last they tended to attract jurors who were not in full-time work, and therefore often consisted of women, students or the elderly. Weren't Labour meant to be in favour of such people?

The debate ended with a summing up from Home Office minister Joan Ryan, by wide agreement one of the House's feeblest debaters. She admitted that she was "not a lawyer". It got the biggest laugh of the day.

After such a debate it can surely not be long before Hesford is made a junior minister – oh, and O'Brien is promoted to the Cabinet.

'Gavel Basher'

OVER the past couple of years, scores of parliamentary questions from the government's fiercest tax credits critic, Lib Dem shadow work and pensions secretary David Laws, have been stonewalled or wilfully misinterpreted. Smelling a rat, Laws recently used the Data Protection Act to obtain internal HM Revenue & Customs documents related to his questions – and discovered officials doing everything they could to avoid scrutiny.

On one occasion Laws asked about how many HMRC staff were working on tax credit complaints. "Mr Laws' question gives us license not to provide staffing numbers … as he asks about HMRC staff, not TCO [tax credit office] staff," wrote an HMRC official, even though the question obviously referred to that office. And when one request couldn't be evaded, the prospect of actually answering to parliament horrified the official: "He needs a full and substantive reply I fear."

Such instinctive covering up clearly breaches Cabinet Office guidance, under which staff should "approach every [parliamentary] question predisposed to give relevant information fully", and "not omit information sought merely because disclosure could lead to political embarrassment or administrative inconvenience" – exactly the reason Laws' questions were treated with such contempt. The parliamentary authorities might soon have something to say about it.

Laws also learnt that he has the honour – on instructions from Paymaster General Dawn Primarolo – of having answers to all his questions vetted by the HMRC chairman, presumably in case a more junior official is tempted to do anything so silly as to draft an informative response.

FORMER toady Chris Bryant, MP for the Rhondda, has discovered how to profit from his humourlessness. The *Guardian* is about to pay £10,000 plus costs to assuage his hurt feelings over a spoof online diary, parodying his ultra-modernist blather, which appeared on the paper's website during last month's Labour conference (see *Eye* 1170).

At the time, Bryant told the *Western Mail* he was flattered that the *Guardian* assumed its readers knew who he was. He wouldn't be complaining, he added, "because I have a sense of humour".

But then he changed his mind and consulted m'learned friends. Had the case gone to court, he intended to claim that the *Guardian* was guilty of "passing off", since readers might reasonably have thought the drivelling articles were by him – yet he also argued that they were a "cruel parody" and therefore defamatory.

Bryant, of course, is quite capable of defaming himself – by posing on internet chatrooms in his Y-fronts, say – without any assistance from cruel parodists.

NADINE DORRIES MP, fondly known by some mid-Bedfordshire constituents as "mad Nad", seems to be getting even madder.

"I am not quite sure how *Private Eye* gets away with printing such awful rubbish!" she shrieks on her blog. "Maybe people realise that it's all tosh which is why their readership is so low … I reckon they print nonsense in the hope that they will be sued … If they didn't print such rubbish and weren't sued, where would they be?"

Nad should know. As we revealed in *Eye* 1171 she is herself facing a libel action from Peter May, director of the National Institute for Research into Aquatic Habitats, whom she attacked on *The Politics Show*.

The Dorries blog is full of delights. Recent treats include a pub quiz where she was asked to name Britain's first woman MP ("Guess what, I didn't know!"), and a sudden influx of mail "from very hunky personal bodyguards offering to protect me. I wish … if only … oh well!"

Alas, she has no time for more pressing questions, such as why a self-styled defender of the "rural way of life" and "green fields" is backing a £160m Center Parcs scheme which would bury many acres of green fields in her constituency under 700 "villas", a hotel, a bowling alley, a huge conference centre and a superstore.

Her only reaction to the *Eye* piece, after the rant quoted above, is this mysterious admonition: "The Mayor of Bedford needs to realise that you don't have friends in politics. Not a week goes by without my office receiving a telephone call informing us of some comment or other he has made. He really does need to be very careful!" What can the old fruitbat mean?

Number crunchings

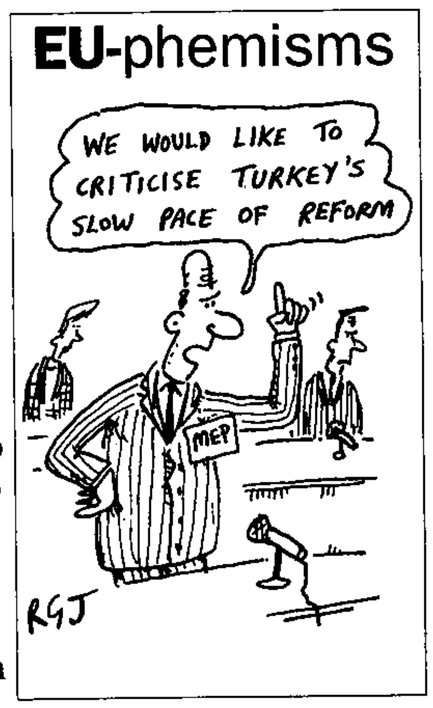
10%

■ Rise in spending on overseas development assistance by government this year to help "make poverty history".

■ Cut in number of overseas development staff by government this year to help "make efficiency savings".

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

GORDON BROWN's failure – predicted in Eye 1170 – to persuade other EU governments in his efforts to block VAT "missing trader fraud" throws the spotlight on just what the government has been doing to tackle a scam known to have cost billions every year since the late 1990s.



When goods are imported from within the EU no VAT is payable, a fact that fraudsters take advantage of when they sell them on VAT-inclusive before scarpering without handing the money to the taxman. Gordon's plea for a concession from European VAT rules allowing him to charge VAT only when the goods reach their eventual user – through a so-called "reverse charge" – has fallen on deaf ears in Brussels. The French think it will shift the problem on to them and the Germans want it across Europe. But that would re-write the EU VAT system and would not get through the European Commission.

All of which means it's back to the drudge of checking for dodgy VAT repayment claims and investigating fraudsters. And the government's record on that is lamentable. Only this year did Paymaster General Dawn Primarolo increase the number of staff looking at missing trader fraud, while cutting investigators overall – six years after warnings from Brussels that Britain's defences were inadequate and Customs was a soft touch for fraudsters.

Thankfully for Red Dawn, scrutiny of her record is equally poor. Questioned by parliament's Treasury Select Committee two weeks ago on why it had taken the government so long to seek the "reverse charge", HMRC chairman Paul Gray sighed and exclaimed: "Hindsight is a wonderful thing when one looks back on these things." Nobody thought to point out that it wouldn't have taken Mystic Meg to see that once a few billion had been lost to the fraud, several more would go the same way if something weren't done pronto. And that Gordon's fellow European finance ministers were never likely to ride to his rescue.

FOLLOWING our report on attempts to introduce the EU Constitution by the back door (*Eye* 1170), rumblings are continuing in the Brussels jungle. Despite solid French and Dutch "no" votes, the European Commission and some member states are determined to get it back on the agenda with minimal modification.

Just last week, Irish PM Bertie Ahern told Brussels it should learn the lesson of the Nice Treaty. Ireland rejected this in 2001, but after rephrasing the referendum question and a massive advertising campaign, it passed on the second go.

For the commission, therefore, the problem is communication not substance. In charge of the fightback is communications commissioner, Margot Wallström, a figure of some amusement in Brussels for initiatives such as her blog (which tells us, for example, that AIDS is "an important issue", and "I always read books that make me cry") and her logo for next year's 50th anniversary of the EU, which has managed to annoy just about everyone.

In a recent speech, Wallström said that not having a constitution could mean more terrorism, epidemics and chemical accidents. Her source for this? A commission analysis. She also partly blamed the constitution "no" votes on failure "to generate debate about Europe". This might surprise the French, who talked of almost nothing else in the run-up to their referendum; the government even sent copies of the constitution to every household in the country.

But when it comes to its own popularity, Brussels has an increasing tendency to massage the message, as shown by recent suppression of unfavourable opinion polls. The commission's own Eurobarometer surveys are normally published within two months, but a poll showing declining public support for EU energy policies is still waiting to be released – nearly eight months after it was carried out.

AFTER the recent kerfuffle over whether MPs should have to pay the minimum wage to their volunteer interns, the *Eye* can reveal that interns working for free to get political experience in the office of Margaret Moran MP are also called upon to work for the "social business" that she runs.

Moran, who recently hit headlines after allegedly misusing House of Commons letter-headed paper in a personal dispute over a footpath near her Spanish holiday villa, runs eQuality Networks, which has put together websites for various social exclusion schemes.

In response to a several questions about whether unpaid interns are indeed working for eQuality Networks, Moran's office replied: "The statement that has been made is preposterous and defamatory. We demand immediate information as to the source of the information."

When told not to be so silly, Moran's office explained that eQuality Networks is a "social enterprise… run by a group of dedicated volunteers. It is not a business". Hmmm. Perhaps they need to look again at the definition of "social enterprise" given by the UK's Social Enterprise Coalition: "Social enterprises are dynamic businesses with a social purpose."

And who are those volunteers? "All [interns] to date have been keen to get involved in such projects as it provides them with further experience to put on their CVs."

While ignoring the question of how many interns worked for Moran at once to cover all this work, her office helpfully informed us that "Margaret freely devotes her time, energy and enthusiasm" to the Luton Irish Forum and Kashmir Earthquake Committee. Although, of course, *she* gets a salary for being an MP.

HOME OFFICE ministers are so scared of a humiliating defeat over controversial plans to privatise the probation service – recently slated in a bizarre speech to prison inmates by Home Secretary John Reid – they have been desperately trying to woo Tory support.

Last week Reid's side-kick Gerry Sutcliffe emailed all Conservative MPs offering to meet them to garner votes for the National Offender Management Bill. Meanwhile the entire Tory frontbench was invited to a special meeting in Portcullis House to explain how positive the measures were.

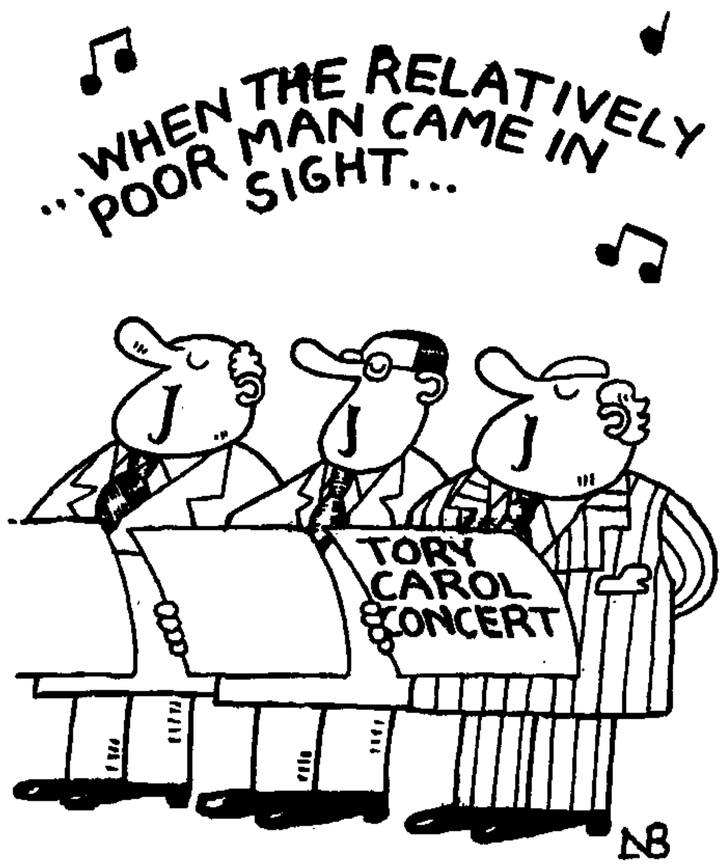
Sadly no one took up the offer. They were too busy attending a Commons lobby organised by probation staff, where parliamentarian after parliamentarian spoke out in opposition to the proposed reforms. Government whips were also loitering at the back, no doubt marking down the names of members of Labour's rebels-in-waiting.

IT'S NOT just David Cameron who is jumping on the Slow Food organic bandwagon. At a recent lunch held at the House of Lords to honour the founder of the Slow Food movement, Carlo Petrini, Defra minister Lord Rooker stood up and said that the principles of the movement were exactly in line with the government's own attitude to farming and food production.

One of the main principles of Slow Food is the use of raw or unpasteurised milk for cheesemaking. Can this be the same Lord Rooker who has spent so much of his ministerial time trying to outlaw raw milk?

Indeed it can.

'Backbiter'



TV

Russell Brand (Channel 4)

THE theory of British television over the last 25 years is that an old generation of cosy performers has been overtaken by an edgier set: Tarby replaced by the Comic Strip set, Parky shown the way to go by Jonathan Ross and so on. Fluff is supposed to have been replaced by tough, sycophancy by irreverence.

In practice, older viewers must frequently feel that they're in a time-warp. Take **Russell Brand**, for example. The bad-boy of British broadcasting has come via MTV and More4 to claim a Friday night talk-show opposite Ross on BBC1.

Although Brand's brand is anything but the opposite of Ross's. Like his older rival, Brand now has a Friday night chatter followed by a Saturday morning Radio2 show. Given such a similar profile, you might think that the new man would want to put his own spin on the products. But, instead, his Channel 4 talk-show begins with CCTV footage from the dressing rooms of that night's guests, a clear rip-off from Ross's Green Room previews. Brand then makes a few topical comments - in week one, Cruise's wedding, Madge's adoption, Macca's divorce - while his long hair laps against his shoulders in self-satisfaction. Only the fact that the monologue is spoken in a mock-

ney tenor rather than baritone lisp makes it seem remotely new.

Then Brand gets to do an interview, theoretically the point of chat-shows. The first guests are Matt Lucas and David Walliams, close friends and supporters, who have done a similar mascot job on Wossy's shows in the past.

The friends exchange gifts. The fact that one of the prezzies is a chocolate cock is supposed to give the impression of irreverence but is an example of how the show uses an apparently risky tone to disguise soft content. Take away the prop of the confectionary phallus and what we are watching is indistinguishable from those old Parky-Tarby chats: a sycophantic conversation between great showbiz mates. At one point, Walliams and Brand even declare that they love each other, which at least the old golf-sweatered duo used to avoid.

Then there was a sketch in which Brand pretended to be Walliams swimming the channel. Again, frequent f-words might have given the impression that this was somehow dangerous late-night TV but, as soon as the tape ended, Brand checked that Walliams wasn't offended by it and assured him that he was a great human being because of all he did for charity.

As with Wossy, a potty-mouth and a bit of hippy attitude disguise the fact that, underneath, Brand is as smarmy and clubby as a Hollywood entertainment reporter.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

Sudo-Q, BBC2

Eamonn Holmes: What title did Edward VIII take after his abdication?

Contestant: Edward the Confessor.

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: In history, Emma Hamilton was the mistress of which English admiral?

Contestant: Napoleon.

Robinson: What was the name of the woman involved in the Profumo scandal? Christine...?

Contestant: Hamilton.

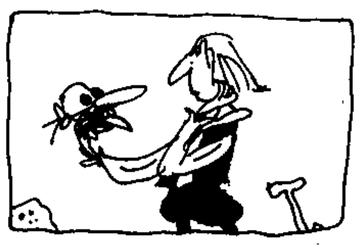
In It To Win It, BBC1

Dale Winton: Boo Radley is a character in which prize-winning 1960s novel?

Two contestants *(after conferring)*: Pride and Prejudice.

LUVVIES

David Hare tells a story about losing his temper in the hospitality room of the National Theatre when his play *Amy's View* was being premiered there nine years ago. 'There were these people who were criticising the play and I told them to... to go away if they didn't like it. They were talking to me as if they were basically entitled to criticise what I had written.'



DAVID HARE
Sunday Telegraph

Submitted by Francis Harvey.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

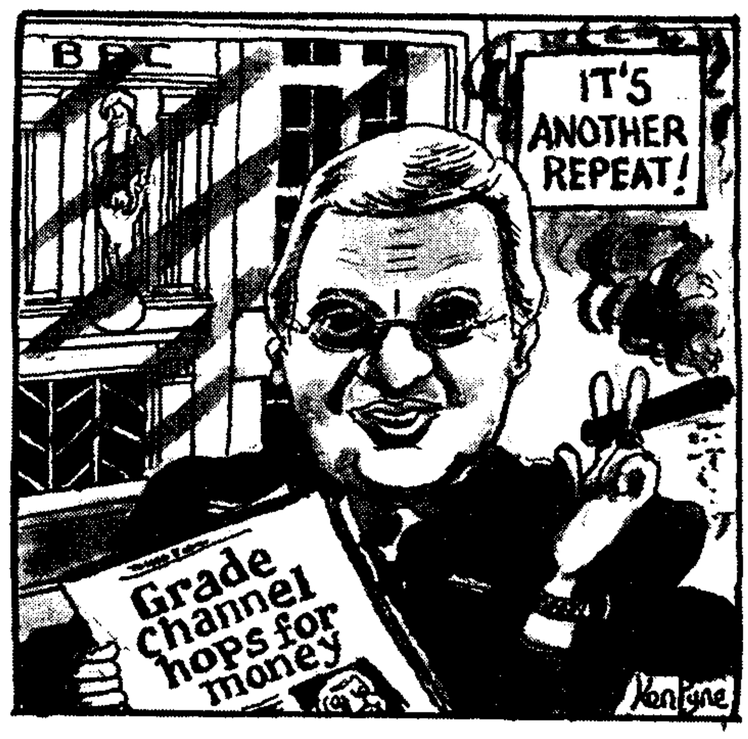
MEDIA NEWS

"I FEEL comfortable that I achieved what I set out to achieve – namely restore the equilibrium of this great institution, to lead the process to appoint a new DG, to secure a new ten year charter and to reform the governance of the corporation." So boasted Michael Grade in his resignation email to BBC staff.

Continuing redundancies, cuts in programme budgets and the continuing policy of "outsourcing" as much of the corporation as possible have not produced a sense of "equilibrium" among staff at all. Morale is very low.

The process to appoint a new DG is still marred by controversy and the new charter may be secured only with a lot less money that expected.

As for his reform of the system of governance? It has been thrown into chaos by his own departure. To add insult to injury, the story of Grade's departure was broken by the *Telegraph*, not the BBC's own hacks.



JUST how much sleuthing did Jeff Randall have to do to get his exclusive story about Michael Grade defecting from the BBC to ITV?

Randall is of course an old BBC hand, so perhaps someone at the Beeb tipped him off. But he's also in the middle of making a programme for ITV, so maybe he picked up the information from one of his chums on the ITV board.

There is, however, an even simpler explanation. Randall's agent is Anita Land – aka Michael Grade's sister.

"GRADE Escape" chortled the *Sun* over the news that the "charismatic" Michael Grade had defected from the BBC to ITV.

"His appointment is fantastic news for telly viewers," enthused the paper's editorial. "Wherever he has worked, Mr Grade has been involved in the making of great TV shows, from *The Professionals* in the 70s to *EastEnders* in the 80s and, in the 90s, bringing US hits like *Friends* and *ER* to the nation's living rooms... If anyone is capable of bringing back the glory days of ITV, it is him. So stay tuned."

The paper even listed the highlights of a "career packed with A-Grades" with "fun *Sun* gradings for performance in each job" – including top marks for "overseeing last year's successful relaunch of *Doctor Who*", despite the fact he had nothing to do with it and it was he who axed the programme in the first place.

Could this Michael Grade possibly be related to the "fat cat broadcasting chief" and "hypocrite" slammed by the *Sun* last spring for ensuring his "future is cushy at the bloated BBC" by "landing a £57,000-a-year pay rise – from January he will bag £140,000 of licence fee cash"? He is indeed. So what has changed between then and now (apart from that salary, mysteriously reduced to £110,000 in the *Sun*'s latest coverage)?

Well, there is the fact that as of the previous week, the *Sun*'s sister company BSkyB has been ITV's biggest shareholder, with an 18 percent stake. Welcome on board, Mr Grade!

GOING LIVE

AND over to Rachel Harvey of BBC News 24 for the latest on the health of the late Alexander Litvinenko's associate Mario Scaramella:

"Do we have any idea how long he is going to be in hospital at this stage?".

"No, not at this stage."

BOTH Sky News and BBC News 24 devoted huge amounts of airtime to the discovery of radioactive materials on British Airways aircraft. Helicopters were despatched to take aerial shots of two parked planes and correspondents at Heathrow and in Moscow were *standing* by all day to update the story. But despite the hours of coverage, how big a story was it?

"The risk of contamination is miniscule," reported Enda Brady on Sky. Later on Sky, Lawrence McGinty revealed that: "The levels are so small there is no risk to public health." But still the coverage continued to dominate.

WHILE Alexander Litvinenko lay dying, but before radiation poisoning was diagnosed, foghorn-voiced BBC hack John Sweeney decided a tribute was in order. He persuaded a few fellow hacks to join him for a "pilgrimage" round the London venues visited by the Russian dissident on the fateful day.

Finding the sushi bar shut, Sweeney and his pilgrims proceeded to the Pine Bar at the Millennium Hotel in Grosvenor Square. Over trebles all round, emotional toasts were drunk to Litvinenko and murdered Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya.

A couple of days later Sweeney flew to Russia – just as it was announced that traces of Polonium-210 had been found at the bar. He is now "taking the waters" in Moscow, wondering how he'll know if he has radiation poisoning. "The first sign is that your hair falls out – but all mine fell out years ago," wails the dome-pated hack.

A LICENCE fee increase below the level of inflation, very much on the Brownite agenda, will plunge the BBC into a new era of industrial disputes.

In the final year of the "Value for Money" belt-tightening project, 108 posts have yet to go in BBC News. That includes four compulsory redundancies, including two correspondents from *Newsnight*, three radio reporters from the regions and a series of "selection processes" for a further 39 staff across the newsroom.

But these figures were projected on a licence-fee increase in line with inflation. Less money will mean more redundancies and the broadcasting unions are already voicing their displeasure. Stand by for a new round of industrial action in the New Year… and more repeats.

Each fortnight The Cartoon Museum at 35 Little Russell Street is featuring a bubble competition as part of the *'Private Eye at 45'* cartoon exhibition.

This issue's winner is **Oliver Gili** from London E1.

CHANNEL 4's diet guru Gillian McKeith obviously finds it difficult to swallow criticism.

November saw her rapped by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) for making medicinal claims about her food supplements, without the necessary legal authorisation. McKeith was quickly telling the press that this was the fault of EU bureaucrats "concerned that people in the UK are having too much good sex", while her own website claimed the products had been withdrawn because of a new EU ruling.

Er no, says the MHRA, the products were never legal for sale in the UK.

Dr McKeith is also touchy about people on the internet quibbling about the value of that doctorate. Just to be clear: it is a PhD in Holistic Nutrition gained through a correspondence course from the American Holistic College of Nutrition. Blogger "PhDiva" received a letter from Atkins Solicitors threatening court action after she referred to "women who buy degrees by mail order" and talked about her own bad experience with a quack nutritionist in the same posting as linking to an article about McKeith on the BadScience website. Attempting to placate the lawyers she has now re-posted clarifying that she never meant to suggest McKeith purchased her qualification.

Meanwhile McKeith's lawyers also contacted web animator Eclectech over a silly song featuring a cartoon McKeith (complete with dancing stools thanks to her propensity for studying her TV subjects' faeces), demanding the removal of lyrics about her degree.

VISITORS to the canteen at the BBC's soon-to-be-scrapped Scottish headquarters at Queen Margaret Drive in Glasgow are currently greeted by large display boards detailing the "vision" for its replacement, Pacific Quay, on the banks of the Clyde.

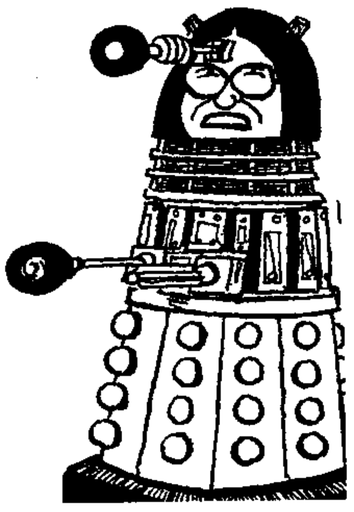
"The approach to the interior design of the building is about recognising the many different ways that people will need to interact and meet," they are informed by Graven Images, the "cross-disciplinary design consultancy" commissioned to kit out the inside of the building. "The building fabric and content will make it clear to its users and visitors who you are and what you do, your values and beliefs, your stories and myths."

As far as staff can tell, this means that the walls are mostly made of glass so their bosses will be able to tell if they're working or not.

11.00 The Perfect Penis
Charting the quest for penile perfection, which has driven men to extraordinary and dangerous lengths.
Director/Producer Krishna Govender (R) (S) 12176

Radio Times

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"We need some big projects that really stand out against the media skyline. We've started to call them Skyscraper projects – the ones you can't miss and can't do without. Skyscraper projects can come from any genre. But they will always have a powerful multi-platform aspect… I want to encourage more of this thinking. I've already decided to steer £10m of next year's Think Big fund towards projects that support multi-platform content. In addition I can announce today that I'm earmarking a further £25m over the next two years for projects that embody blue-skies thinking – including standalone web projects." – *speech by Jana Bennett, BBC Director of Vision (formerly director of Television)*

Drew entered his Pan seared Scottish Smoked Salmon with spinach, pickled veg with crisp crap wonton in Kumquat sauce.

Buchan Observer

O·B·N

JEREMY CLARKSON's Christmas bonus from News International should be assured after his efforts in his *Sun* column on 25 November.

"Now Richard Branson wants new laws which prevent one man from owning too many media outlets. He says that if Rupert Murdoch gets ITV, it'll be a disaster," he observed. "What??!!? How could it possibly be worse than it is now? For crying out loud, you can't have laws dictating who owns what. The whole thing is just ridiculous."

AD NAUSEAM

THE Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is currently looking for an advertising agency to launch an awareness campaign on climate change in the New Year. The campaign is meant to increase consumer understanding of how carbon dioxide emissions affect our climate. Defra has shortlisted three agencies for the pitch: AMV, DFGW and VCCP.

"Government has an important role to play," said the Environment Minister David Miliband, "but so does business and the individual. Only if we all act together will we move Britain towards a low-carbon economy and reduce emissions."

On the subject of acting together, he might have had a quick look at the shortlisted agencies' client lists. AMV advertise General Electric, DaimlerChrysler and Volvo, DFGW do the same for those fervent eco-warriors at General Motors, and VCCP work for both Hyundai and Texaco. Perhaps one way to stop climate change would be to stop promoting the companies that cause it?

A NEW press campaign for an Australian high-performance sportswear company cocks a snook at the sponsorship tactics of sports behemoth Nike.

The ad, for a company called Skins, takes Nike's famous swoosh and literally subverts it – placed upside down on the face of an athlete, the swoosh looks like a grimace, complementing the tagline, "We don't pay sports stars to wear our product. They pay us."

A spokesman for Nike has said it is considering legal action. This is just a little bit rich. Nike has been built on canny marketing, and the mainstay of its strategy has always been so-called guerrilla tactics – ambushing major sporting events by running timely campaigns while not coughing up to be official sponsors. Moreover, it was only back in September that Nike was forced to pay £300,000 to Hackney Council after it used the council's logo and title on a range of football equipment and apparel… without permission.

Down on the Farm

THE BBC's out of touch *Farming Today* is becoming *Farming Yesterday* as it embarrasses itself with its attempts to cover the subject.

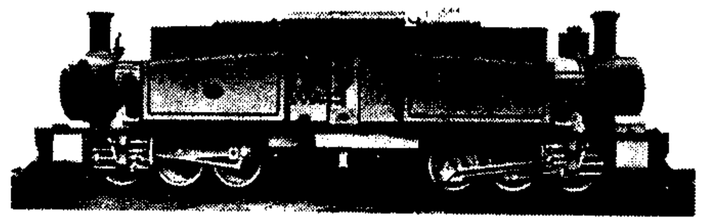
If there is one problem which puts modern farmers to the test more than any other it is the flood of mad regulations and paperwork pouring out of Brussels, only made worse by the way these are enforced by Defra. So it was a considerable surprise the other day when presenter Miriam O'Reilly devoted a whole programme to the problem of "EU red tape" (two things the programme is normally rather keen on). She got off to a good start by announcing that, since 1997, shock, horror, 15 new regulations had been issued every working day. Obviously she was unaware that this figure relates to the total number of regulations issued by the UK government on every subject under the sun, only a small percentage of them concerned with farming. When a village shopkeeper then related how she had been told by officials to put a label on peanuts she was selling for birds, warning that they contained nuts, O'Reilly was so excited that she repeated the story later in the programme, although it had nothing to do with farming.

She then had someone explain how, under the so-called IACS system (Integrated Administration and Control System), farmers had to pay the Ordnance Survey to make maps of their farms. O'Reilly seemed unaware that this problem was last a big talking point back in 1993, and IACS has been scrapped. Another interviewee explained how some farmers have to pay more than £5,000 a year for the privilege of being regulated under another EU scheme called Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (this has only been a talking point since 1996). Instead of registering that this was quite a lot of money to pay for nothing, 0'Reilly could only purr, "some farmers do need regulation, don't they?", as if that made it all perfectly rational.

She found another interviewee to make the claim that there is an EU book containing every regulation applying to farmers, and that in the last few years this has grown from 86,000 pages to 110,000 (he also insisted that ministers had to sign every single one of those 110,000 pages – so *that's* what Defra ministers have been doing all these years). Clearly bemused by such large figures, O'Reilly wasn't quick enough to grasp that such a book would be 27 feet thick, making the story somewhat improbable. But she did assure us that an "independent" body called the Better Regulation Commission was going to jolly well do its best to reduce this mountain (she seemed unaware that governments have been saying this since 1992, to no effect whatever). She gave the last word to our "biodiversity minister", Defra's Barry Gardner, who explained at great length how we are legally obliged to enforce all the Brussels red tape, and that most farmers have absolutely no objection to it. Like the little lamb she is, Ms O'Reilly seemed quite happy to take him at his word.

'Muckspreader'

SIGNAL FAILURES



Inventive incentives

NETWORK RAIL declared its first profit last week, and already train operators are dreaming up ways to get their paws on its cash.

Unlike the franchisees operating the trains, NR doesn't exist to make profits. It has no shareholders and any surplus will be spent on the railway or used to reduce its enormous debt. That structure has worked pretty well since NR took over from profit-driven Railtrack. Much of Failtrack's legacy of neglect has been overcome, delays and accidents have fallen and maintenance is more efficient.

The flaw in NR's structure is lack of contact with passengers because it doesn't run trains. Instead it focuses on engineering and ignores the problems caused when railways shut down for maintenance.

Train operators want to change NR's focus – but not to passengers. They told the rail regulator that NR has little incentive to be efficient without shareholders to satisfy. Already they seem to have forgotten the lesson of Railtrack plc – that deferring maintenance looks clever when short-term profits are the goal.

GNER reckons NR must be changed, "to incentivise a company that is not subject to pressure from equity holders". (GNER itself provides a fine example of incentivisation by shareholder pressure: its Sea Containers parent company is bankrupt and its new franchise is such a disaster it's already being revised.) GNER's big idea is that train operators buy shares in NR, using government money. "This would give train operators a stake in Network Rail to press for efficiency gains which were congruent with the TOC's [train operating company's] franchise plan," GNER told the regulator. So not only would those shareholders demand dividends, but each would clamour for NR to prioritise spending to boost its own annual results – potentially pulling NR 30 different ways at once.

Stagecoach's South West Trains suggests an even better wheeze: tails I win, heads you lose. It says NR should share with franchisees any surplus from beating targets, and adds: "Any benefit sharing must be one way; TOC's [sic] equity base prevents them from sharing the risk of NR underperformance." So when NR misses its targets and needs more cash, franchisees and their shareholders wouldn't contribute a penny.

The Association of Train Operating Companies says franchisees already provide "free consultancy" to NR, by making suggestions on infrastructure projects. It reckons "operators would put more effort into the area if there were increased incentives for doing so" (ie financial incentives). But shouldn't the operational benefits, including better punctuality, be sufficient reward for franchisees to help NR improve the infrastructure?

Er, no. NR's improved performance is a nuisance to some operators. Under a mechanism set up at privatisation, they now find themselves paying bonuses to NR for cutting delays. Northern Rail is so cheesed off it's considering asking for a cap on its bonus payments. Funny how train operators never moaned about this particular incentive system while Railtrack was paying them compensation for the delays it caused.

ALISTAIR Darling's four years as transport secretary were a dark age for British transport.

His job was to get transport out of the headlines, which involved blocking or deferring significant projects. He used the Railways Act 2005 to give his own department unprecedented control of railways while perpetuating the Tories' franchising system, which even the Tories admit was ill-conceived.

So why did FirstGroup chief Moir Lockhead choose Darling as his "favourite transport minister" when interviewed by the *Sunday Telegraph*? Could his choice be related to the four rail franchises FirstGroup won when Darling was transport secretary, two of which are "expected to be highly profitable" (in FirstGroup's words) and were awarded after Darling appointed FirstGroup high-flier Mike Mitchell as his head of rail (*Eyes passim*)? Or could it be related to Darling's refusal to regulate buses, leaving FirstGroup free to clobber the poor with massive fares rises (*Eyes passim*)? Or to Darling's blocking of tram schemes in Leeds, Portsmouth and north Manchester which would have competed with FirstGroup's buses?

'Dr B Ching'

MONEY DOWN THE TUBE

CHRIS BOLT, the "arbiter" who is supposed to ensure that taxpayers get value for money from the billions being spent via a public-private partnership to renew London's creaking underground system, is right to point the finger at pisspoor infrastructure company Metronet over the £750m predicted overspend.

But let's not ignore the real culprit in the tube debacle: the Chancellor Gordon Brown, who against the advice of just about every transport expert in the country insisted that PPP was the most economical way to pay for the £30bn scheme to run, maintain and refurbish the network. As a result, Londoners will be paying a heavy price until 2033.

Brown, with his hyperactive adviser Shriti Vadera, and Geoffrey Robinson, then the paymaster-general and personal banker to Peter Mandelson, insisted on the rotten deal even when it emerged that far from paying for itself from private investment, it would require £1bn a year from the taxpayer. Now even that £1bn annual bill may prove optimistic.

Robinson dreamt up the idea and had it endorsed by an advisory committee of four of his cronies: Sir Malcolm Bates, a PPP champion; John Roques, a former partner of Deloitte & Touche; Sir Graham Hearne, chairman of Enterprise Oil; and Ed Wallace, chairman of PowerGen.

Gordon Brown then overcame opposition from John Prescott, who was in charge of transport in Tony Blair's first term; and, determined not to be dissuaded at any cost, refused to meet Bob Kiley, the then transport commissioner for London, who knew a thing or two about contracts and who had been desperate to ensure a better deal for Londoners. Meanwhile Brown's side-kick Vadera attended every negotiation meeting ensuring the plans stayed on track, even when most bidders – beaten by the sheer complexity of the PPP deals – fell by the wayside.

But now the size of the debacle is clear, the question is: who will pick up the £750m bill? Bolt made no secret of his view that the bulk of it should come from Metronet, the consortia of five "world class companies" (sic) and old friends of the *Eye*: Atkins, Balfour Beatty, Bombardier, Thames Water and EDF Energy. Metronet was slammed for deficient management and for being "inefficient and uneconomic". But the company has maintained it will prove that some of the money was spent efficiently and that will mean that the taxpayer will have to foot part of the bill.

Transport for London (TfL) and London mayor Ken Livingstone never wanted the deal foisted on them by the government (which spent £500m in legal and consultancy fees to set it up). So expect the mother of all rows if Brown – whether he is in No 10 or 11 – refuses to underwrite any extra costs. After all, TfL has a big role to play in ensuring nothing happens to trip up the smooth running of the Olympics in 2012.

■ROTTEN BOROUGHS■

SIR ROBIN'S 'HOOD

LAST YEAR London Borough of Newham housing supremo Kamal Faizi promised the council would be taking "new and innovative approaches to homelessness". Newham had just been named "homelessness champion" by the office of the deputy prime minister (uh-oh!) and Mr Faizi was keen, he told *London Housing* magazine, to start "telling people [in other boroughs] about our good ideas".

One key element of Newham's success, he said, was increasing the number of leasing arrangements for temporary accommodation with private landlords. Such deals, he boasted, could provide housing management "as good as, if not better than, in social housing". Another initiative was to set up a "registered social landlord" called Local Space which would purchase properties to house the homeless and then lease them back to the council. Newham gave Local Space 450 properties, worth £50m, plus £1.5m working capital. There was another £25m from the Housing Corporation, backed up with a £200m loan from the Royal Bank of Canada.

One year on, things are not looking too clever. It has emerged that Newham paid private lettings companies, principally Manor Sales and Lettings of Ilford, to provide temporary accommodation for homeless people at more than 600 properties. But very few homeless people were actually placed in them – they were either left vacant, or Manor let them to private tenants. Meanwhile external auditors have been called in to peer into a £6.5m hole in the accounts of Local Space.

Amanda Kelly, the borough's former legal chief, who last year produced a damning report on the management of Newham's parks constabulary (*Eyes* passim), has spent the autumn investigating the housing scandal. Her report is currently with Newham's elected mayor, Sir Robin Wales.

Mr Faizi, architect of the Labour council's "new and innovative approaches to homelessness", had meanwhile departed across the river to Lewisham, to advise that council's "executive director for customer services", Lesley Seary, about, er, housing and homelessness. Ms Seary's live-in partner, Chris Wood, just happens to be deputy chief executive of Newham council – a pal of Mr Faizi and his immediate former boss. The much in demand Mr Faizi has now taken up a senior post with the Swan Housing Association – another "partner" of Newham Council.

MILTON AGONISTES

HATS OFF to Sir Simon Milton, Tory leader of Westminster City Council, who is showing the way to more open local government!

Back in September the *Eye* asked Cllr Milton why, given that the website of the Association of Professional Political Consultants lists him as a senior consultant with giant PR outfit APCO UK Ltd, there was no reference to such employment in his section of the register of members' interests at Westminster council. Sir Simon replied: "I am not an employee of APCO UK and have not been since 2001. I left the company in order to spend more time as leader of Westminster City Council and to pursue my own business interests as a consultant through my company Hapsfield Management Services Ltd ... APCO UK is a client of Hapsfield and I am retained to provide management mentoring of the current managing director of APCO UK and to assist on occasional client projects. ... I have had no [personal] interest to declare as throughout my time as an employee of APCO, the company had a policy of not undertaking any work in or relating to Westminster council. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, has the company undertaken any work in Westminster since I ceased to be an employee." Curious, then, that prominent among APCO's list of clients is Candy and Candy, the property developers who this year won planning permission from Westminster council for London's most expensive block of flats, One Hyde Park, where 86 apartments are planned at up to £25m each.

Since our inquiry, "in the interests of complete transparency and on a voluntary basis", Sir Simon has amended his entry on the register to reveal that his company Hapsfield's clients "include APCO Worldwide".

Well done! All it needs now, in the interest of complete transparency, is for the register of interests to be posted on the council's website, so people could actually read it.

IRRITABLE ROWELL

PANIC has broken out at County Hall on the Isle of Wight following ***Eye*** 1172's revelations about a £13m sea defences scheme.

We noted that outside scrutineers had expressed concern that engineering consultants High-Point Rendel (HPR) had been put in charge of the work without going through proper tendering procedures – exactly the same problem that beset Scarborough Borough Council's disastrous Castle Headland sea defence scheme three years ago, which went way over budget when HPR got the job after a similarly slapdash procedure (*Eyes* passim). The man in charge at Scarborough, Derek "Irritable" Rowell, is now "strategic director, economic development and regeneration" at Isle of Wight council – and in overall control of sea defences.

After our story appeared, IoW chief executive Joe "Vera" Duckworth pledged an immediate internal investigation, with the results to be made public. The Tory council's spin doctors, meanwhile, are in a terrible tangle. They told the local *County Press* that work on the Undercliff Drive scheme had started before Rowell arrived. False! Rowell was interviewed in April 2003 and arrived in August that year. A report by independent consultants the QP Group, presented to officers, including Rowell, in July 2005, revealed that the Undercliff work started on 14 July 2004 – nearly a year after Rowell joined – but no contract was issued until 17 November that year. The report was then squirreled away by officers, and councillors did not see it until 8 November this year.

PS: Rowell's former colleague John Riby, "head of engineering and harbour services" at Scarborough Borough Council, who was roundly bollocked by the Audit Commission and Penn reports, has had his expertise in the field recognised by being appointed "lead officer" on coastal erosion for the Local Government Association. He told the *Local Government Chronicle* on 23 November that Scarborough needs to spend another £35m on sea defences in the next five years. Trebles all round, no doubt, at High-Point Rendel!

WEAR NEXT?

FOLLOWING the last *Eye*'s revelation about Labour's "voluntary" fundraising levy on councillors' allowances, the Sunderland Labour party has shot itself in the foot again.

The row about the levy came to light after Labour councillor Bryn Sidaway refused to pay three percent of his £7,000 allowance to party coffers, on the grounds that it was a misuse of public funds and broke party rules. He was summoned to a special meeting of the city's Labour group to be bollocked – but resigned from the party and joined the council's Independent group instead.

Now the Independents in Sunderland have complained to the Standards Board for England over a further misuse of public funds by Labour. The letter from chief whip Anne Hall, summoning the 58 Labour councillors to Sidaway's show trial was typed by council leader Bob Symonds' secretary, Sue Clark, a council employee, in council time, copied on a council photocopier on to council paper, put into council envelopes and delivered to the councillors' homes by council couriers.

Sunderland council's standards code prohibits the use of resources, including staff, stationery, PCs, printers and photocopiers, for party political purposes. On Wearside, however, such abuse of public funds is apparently routine.

AUF WIEDERSEHEN, PETS

THE BNP looks set to lose two of its 11 councillors elected to Barking and Dagenham council last May. Sandra Doncaster and her daughter Claire plan to stand down before Sandra's bankruptcy hearing at Romford County Court on 11 January (Eye 1171).

That hearing has been occasioned by the fact that Sandra owes £2,170.34 in council tax. Why she hasn't paid is a mystery, as she and husband Thomas are not short of assets. They own a coach company, Casters, plus the 18-room Clairemont hotel at Sandown on the Isle of Wight *[shurely "White" – Ed]*.

The BNP's own "Donnygate" has not discouraged B&D gauleiter Richard Barnbrook, however. He is shortly to announce himself as BNP candidate for London Mayor.

NOOKS and CORNERS

EVEN if Sheffield never had quite the coherent architecture of those other great Victorian cities of the West Riding, Leeds and Bradford, the good buildings it possesses ought surely to be treasured. So are they jealously protected by Sheffield City Council? Of course not. Any excuse – any argument that they might possibly stand in the way of a profitable commercial development – and down they come.

The latest attempt to make Sheffield look like anywhere else is the plan for the New Retail Quarter in the city centre. Costing some £500 million and intended to occupy a 20-acre site, this is being energetically promoted by English Partnerships, "the government's regeneration and development agency" (i.e., developers' friend). It will consist of about a hundred new shops and up to two hundred residential units, not forgetting parking space for two thousand cars. The new buildings will be designed by exciting architects "from around the world" but the principal architects are the Building Design Partnership. The "preferred development partner", Hammerson plc, of London, assures us that the result will be a "vibrant and innovative retail living and leisure environment of which the city can be proud".

Perhaps you thought that such comprehensive redevelopment of a city centre was a thing of the past: if so, you were wrong. Not only will a great swathe of central Sheffield be entirely rebuilt, but the historic street pattern will be altered and a new curved street created. But what is most depressing is the apparent inability, or disinclination, of the developers to work with existing buildings. A decent 1970s fire station is to be removed and the existing John Lewis store demolished. Much worse is the fact that the listed Bethel Chapel, built in 1852, is proposed for demolition, along with its Victorian neighbours. It is the usual story of profligate waste, regardless of any concern for the "embodied energy" in existing structures and the cost in resources for the new ones. But the worst aspect of the scheme is the proposed destruction of much of Pinstone Street.

Pinstone Street leads up to Sheffield's splendid Town Hall, built in 1890-97 and designed by E.W. Mountford, the architect of the Old Bailey. The consistent character and quality of the contemporary buildings in this street reflect the pride and prosperity of the city in the last decades of the 19th century. Nos. 94-104 Pinstone Street is particularly good, a corner block designed in 1884 by Flockton & Gibbs. These buildings were proposed for listing by the Hallamshire Historic Buildings Society, but English Heritage – cowed by the hostility of the government, starved of funds and increasingly terrified of being seen to oppose any commercial development – advised that they were only of local rather than national interest. Yet, as far as local people are concerned, what matters is local character and local interest.

So Pinstone Street was made part of the City Centre Conservation Area by the City Council. And the Council's own Urban Design Compendium identifies these buildings as having a "positive impact on Sheffield's character". Furthermore, the Unitary Development Plan states that buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area will be retained, and that the retention of historic buildings which are of local interest but not listed will be encouraged wherever practicable. Yet Sheffield City Council, mesmerised by the great god Retail and seduced by the national cult of shopping, is now happy to acquiesce in the demolition of nos. 88-104 Pinstone Street and much more within the City Centre Conservation Area. Sheffield is already suffering from a frenzy of redevelopment: how sad that the councillors have not the slightest idea of what really makes the city worth visiting.

I AM sorry to report that the battle for Fortress House now seems to be lost. Readers will recall (Eye 1159) that this distinguished 1940s office block in Savile Row was vacated by English Heritage earlier this year despite the fact that its lease had four years to run and the rent was a mere £37,000 a year. The wretched Department of Culture, Media and above all Sport ordered EH to leave early and move into temporary accommodation, on the grounds that it would be saving the government money. Worse, doing as it was told, English Heritage endorsed the use of that nefarious device for assisting developers, a Certificate of Immunity from Listing. The owners of Fortress House, Legal & General, wished to develop the whole site, but Guy Oliver, together with SAVE Britain's Heritage and others, argued that the existing building, with its fine Portland stone facades and entrance forecourt, was ideal for conversion into a hotel. Negotiations were opened with Legal & General and with two hotel chains, Anton Bilton's Raven Group and Andre Balazs's Hotel Group, who offered £100 million for the building. Funds were in place and agreement reached when Legal & General suddenly put the site on the market, and the hoteliers were gazumped by the Irish group D2, despite an increased offer. D2 has no interest in Fortress House, so we will now lose a handsome and eminently reusable building. Meanwhile, English Heritage is moving into the old Prudential Assurance building at a hugely increased rent. This premature move has probably cost the government some £12 million in rent – peanuts, of course, compared with the billions being poured into the accursed Olympics for which every heritage and arts budget will soon be raided.

Commercial development in London, Sheffield and elsewhere is surely now completely out of control. Perhaps those who care about our cities should pray for a recession.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Damien always resented how Charles Saatchi used his immense wealth to manipulate the art market.
Really?
SERPENTINE GALLERY
"IN THE DARKEST HOUR THERE MAY BE LIGHT"
WORKS FROM DAMIEN HIRST'S PRIVATE COLLECTION
Fancy that!

I-SPY *Sheffield*

THE Polonium Restaurant

Submitted by Chris Douglas. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

OFF YER BIKE

AFTER more than 30 years as home to London's cycle-racing scene, the Eastway Cycle Circuit in London's Lee Valley was closed in November to make way for the 2012 Olympics.

When the Olympic and Legacy planning permissions were granted in 2004, one of the conditions for the main Olympic Park site in Lee Valley was that the Olympic strategy should "ensure the continuity of suitable circuit facilities throughout the Olympic Construction".

As well as being open to any cyclist or roller-skater wanting to exercise without contending with traffic (and with bikes available to hire), the mile-long road-racing circuit was home to several racing leagues and a youth cycling club trained by top coaches. There were facilities for mountain biking and BMX-ing around the outside of the circuit, and schools used it for cycling proficiency lessons.

So where will the keen cyclists – perhaps even Olympic hopefuls – be training and racing now? Er, nowhere. The London Development Agency has just got around to submitting a planning application for a site at Hog Hill in Redbridge. It says that "if successful", the circuit will open in September/October 2007. The LDA says it is also investigating the "possibility" of opening an interim road cycling circuit on its land in the Royal Docks, from next March, but this too needs planning permission.

So much for better sports facilities thanks to the Olympics – and all this as London prepares to welcome the Tour de France next year.

Trousers	
Shorten	£5.00
Taper	£6.00
Shorten + Taper	£10.00
Shorten Lined	£6.00
Shorten with Turnips	£6.00

Tailoring alternations, Glasgow

BENDY BUS STATION

OOPS! Chelmsford's new £5m bus station is the wrong shape for, er, buses. Essex County Council highways officials finally 'fessed up in November to having badly briefed architects DLA, after drivers reported problems driving the county's new buses around the teardrop-shaped loop.

The new bus station is part of an £80m private redevelopment bringing new offices and flats to the site of the larger old bus station which previously stood there. Although the buses can just about get in and out and drop off their passengers – with the help of much reversing and shifting back and forth – the length of the wheelbase makes it something of a palaver. Further problems arise when – heaven forfend – one bus must pass another. Hardly a great help in keeping services running on time.

Meanwhile the bus station at Tally Ho corner in the London Borough of Barnet, which opened in 2004 beneath the new Arts Depot and flats, remains closed more than a year after it was cordoned off by traffic bosses following the death of a pensioner who was run over while walking in through a bus exit. Transport for London continues to declare the building "closed until further notice", while waiting for the layout to be redesigned to make pedestrian entrances and exits clearer and safer.

Letters

Reality healthcheck

Sir,

The Miracle of St Patricia.

Following the visit to Bedford Hospital of Secretary of State for Health Patricia Hewitt, I submitted a written parliamentary question asking for her assessment of the financial situation, the seriousness of which appeared to have brought her there (Eye 1172).

*Imagine my surprise to be told in the answer that far from there being any problems, **"the 2006-7 forecast outturn for the Bedford Hospital NHS Trust shows that it is £4m in surplus"**! (My emphasis.) There was no mention of the £11.8m deficit, which was miraculously gone! So the ward closures, non-replacement of consultants, three hundred frozen posts, sacking of secretarial staff and warning redundancy notices to many others could now be dispensed with!*

Alas, on visiting the regional chief executive a few days later this illusion was shattered, as indeed he confirmed the deficit continued and that the hospital had in fact just been asked to find an extra £500,000 cuts this year due to the problems in other parts of the region!

I am not sure what to be more concerned about; the distortion of reality in a formal answer in Hansard, which I have gone so far as to describe as a "bare-faced lie" to the Bedford newspaper the Times and Citizen, which bravely printed my comment (so far no writ); the manipulation of civil servants that they can produce such deceitful answers for ministers, which everyone in the area knows cannot possibly be correct; or the fear that the government now run the NHS on what they have convinced themselves must be true, regardless of reality.

Can I take any tablets for these concerns?

ALISTAIR BURT MP,

House of Commons.

Frankly incompetent

Sir,

Thanks for the "Post Office" stamps. I tried posting an envelope with one of the stamps to myself and it worked. I attach the franked envelope to prove it. Thanks!

PHIL JONES,

Slough.

Heartless bankers

Sir,

Perhaps the most laughable aspect of your story about preening merchant banks ("Cash Injection for the Banks", Eye 1172) is that the paltry few million dollars they have made (so far?) out of trading third world aid futures – thanks to Gordon Brown's sweaty combination of naivety and desperation – should be spun as "charitable".

Presumably this is because in their eyes it represents little more than a fraction of one partner or director's annual emolument and they feel benevolent simply having deigned to work for such a tiny amount of money at all.

Nevertheless, creaming western aid budgets has traditionally been the preserve of third world psychopaths so it is lovely to see our own marvellous banking community finally being allowed to join in the fun, even if only modestly to begin with!

Added to the tsunami of cash being siphoned off in the feeding frenzy around the catastrophic PFI schemes, the banks will soon have their mitts on the majority of the UK tax take; in which case we might as well pay our taxes directly to Global Shafting plc and their associates and sideline middleman Gordon Brown altogether. Perhaps this is what they have in mind.

Happy Christmas,

MARTIN KENNEDY,

Via email.

Prezza 'strip' tease

Sir,

Shirley Porter should certainly be charged with perjury (Eye 1172) after lying under oath about her assets.

Perjury apart, this woman who knowingly placed homeless people in asbestos-ridden flats and "sold" three cemeteries and twelve acres of land for 15 pence, causing grief to bereaved families and thereby enriching various unsavoury characters, demeans the DBE she was, surprisingly, accorded.

When I heard she was back in London, I wrote to John Prescott reminding him that he had promised to look into the question of stripping her of her damehood. He has not replied. Perhaps the post is at fault or maybe, in view of his recent problems, the conjunction of "stripping" and "dame" in my letter made him nervous. Whatever. The fact remains that she is not fit to be a Dame and this honour should now be withdrawn.

Yours faithfully,

JANICE JAMES,

Maida Vale, London.

Off the money

Sir,

That Doctor Kelly was hounded to his death (one way or another) by the Blair coterie would be the commonsense conclusion of any objective analysis of the circumstances.

*But that he **had** to commit suicide to protect his wife from **possible** future penury is wildly fanciful.*

Hamlet's soliloquy propounds alternatives concerning "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". And (as Shakespeare in his wisdom almost always does) corollaries are left to the reader.

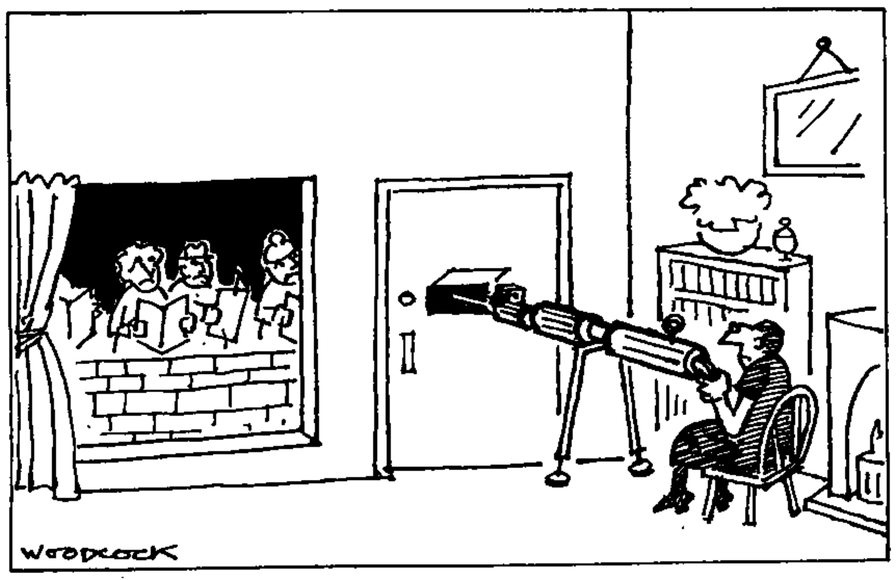
*Incidentally, it's "The pangs of **disprized** love". Subtly different from unrequited.*

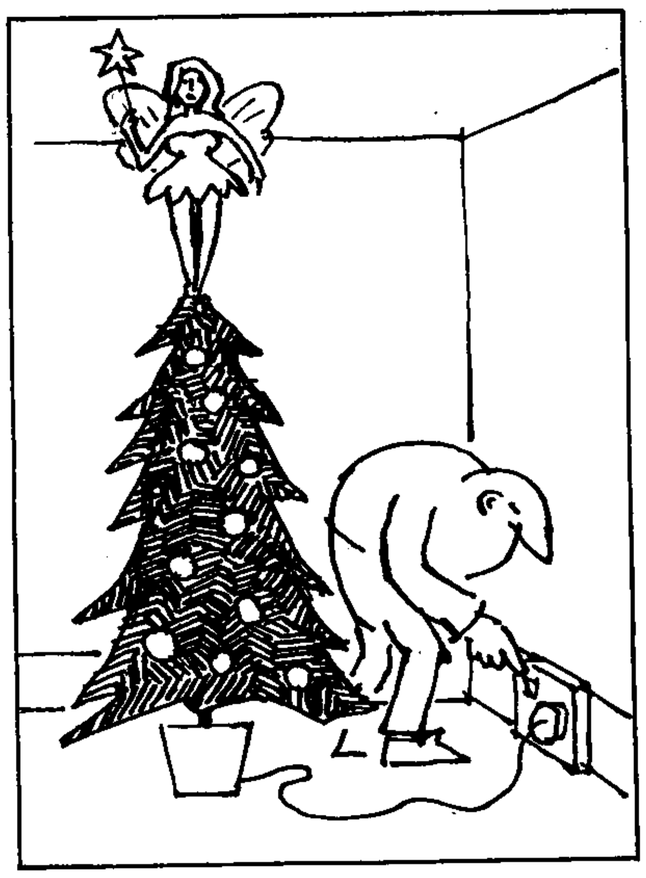
Yours faithfully,

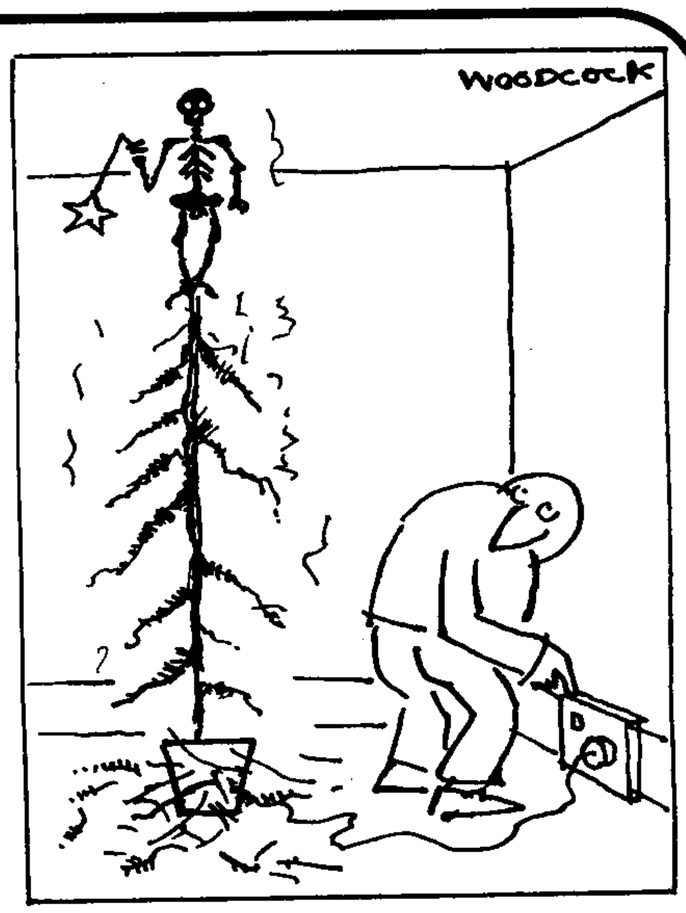
MALCOLM ROBINSON,

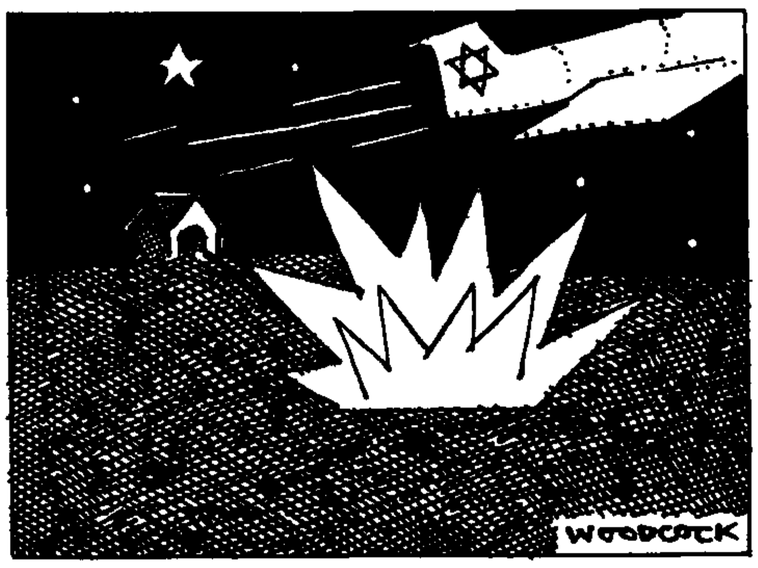
Barnsley.

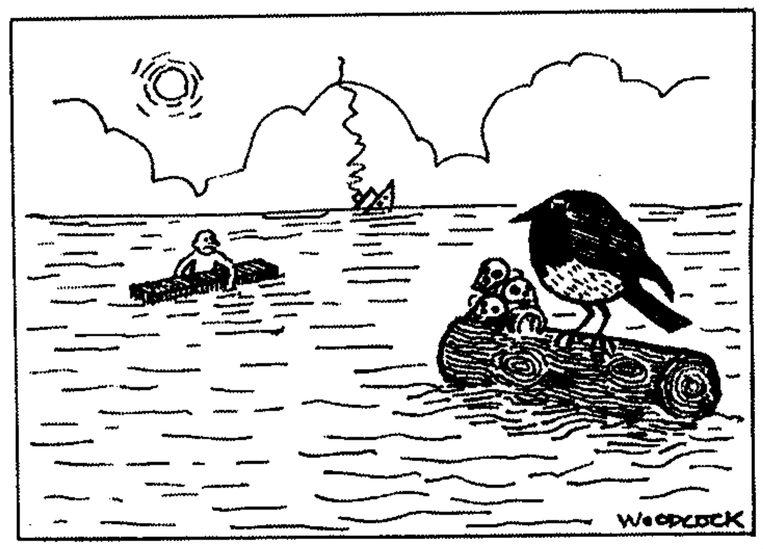
Woodcock's Black Christmas



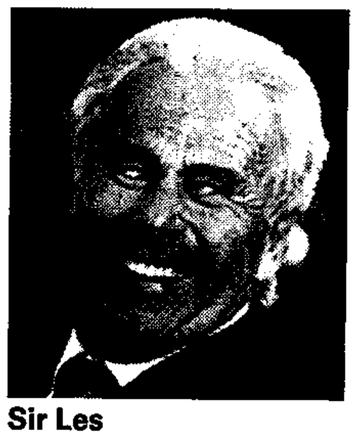








Lookalike Special


Sir Les

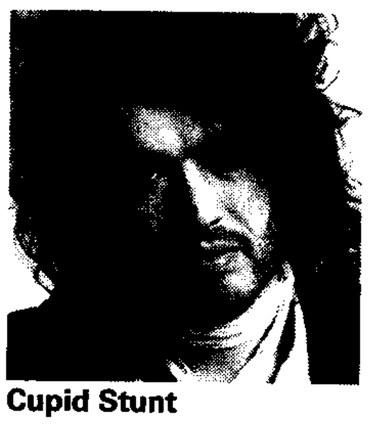
Lord Levy

Dalai Lama

Heaney

Robinson

Andy Pandy


Cupid Stunt

Brand

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the resemblance between Lord Levy and Sir Les Patterson, Seamus Heaney and the Dalai Lama, Anne Robinson and Andy Pandy, Russell Brand and Cupid Stunt? I wonder if, by any chance, any of them are related?

TOM CHOLMONDELEY/
JAGO TENNANT/STEVE RENDLE/
ROGER FULTON,

Via email.

Sad O

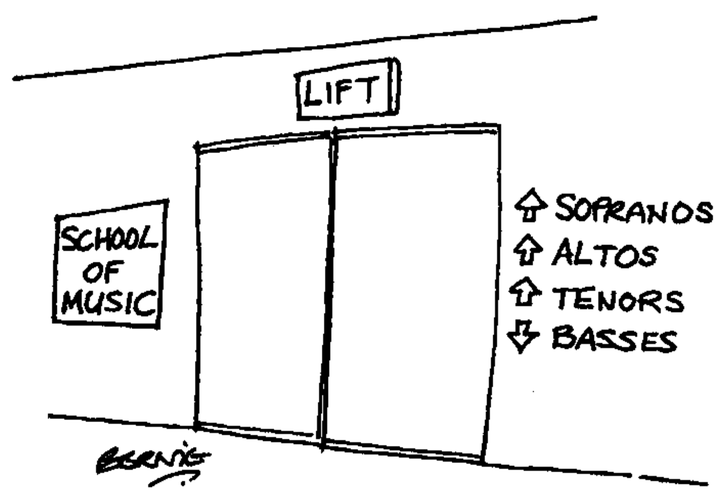
Sir,

Sad to see Lunchtime O'Boulez (Eye 1172) spouting the ridiculous "tired formats" line, especially when Remote Controller regularly chastises desperate broadcasters seeking "new formats". Radio 3's eclectic and delightful mixture of vocal pieces, stage musicals and film sound tracks that is Voices and Stage & Screen is unrepresented elsewhere by the BBC. The disappearance of these programmes, apparently with the approval of O'Boulez, will mean that the vast recorded archive of this material, much like that of jazz, remains largely untouched by the Corporation. So, in this case, more (stations, "diversity", formats) really will mean less (choice).

Yours faithfully,
MARTIN AMSTELL,

Via email.

P.S. I've just heard Pacific 231 and Till Eulenspiegel on Radio 3 for the umpteenth fucking time recently – both so short and so endlessly programmable you see!



Sir,

Re Music & Musicians (Eye 1172).

Whilst I wholeheartedly agree with Lunchtime O'Boulez's observations regarding the lowering of sound reproduction quality at Radio 3 in recent months, I do feel that he is being just a little unfair on the question of recorded as opposed to live broadcasts.

As a middle-aged musician with fairly good hearing I immediately spotted the defects following the "bit rate reduction" but I honestly cannot tell the difference in sound quality between a live and a recorded broadcast performance.

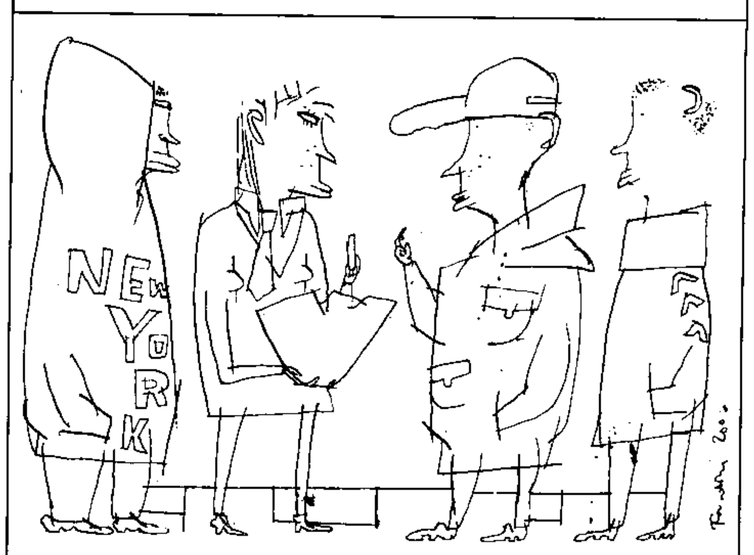
Whilst I do take the point concerning staff saving and reduced costs, and obviously such policy changes can affect employment issues, but on sound I have no problem.

On the matter of "the excitement of a live performance" surely it is not beyond the presentational and technical skills available in this day and age for the BBC to create such an atmosphere even on a recording.

DAVID WILKS,

Leeds.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I've got to be going now, guys, or I'll be late for Scouts"

Moving plea

Sir,

I don't intend to cancel my subscription over this because I don't have one, and I don't even promise never to buy PE again since I quite like it and it hasn't mortally offended me on this occasion. However, I do want to disagree with one of your articles in Issue 1171, the one about the BBC move to Manchester in the Media News section.

Your writer suggested that Mark Thompson should do precisely what 150 MPs are hoping he doesn't do, and pull the plug on the BBC's move to Manchester. You pointed out, quite rightly, that it will cost an estimated £400 million to make the move, money which will have to be paid by licence fee payers, including those beleaguered individuals living in that economically depressed region, the south east. But I don't think that this in itself means that the move should not happen. Some things cost money. Some of those things are good, and/or necessary.

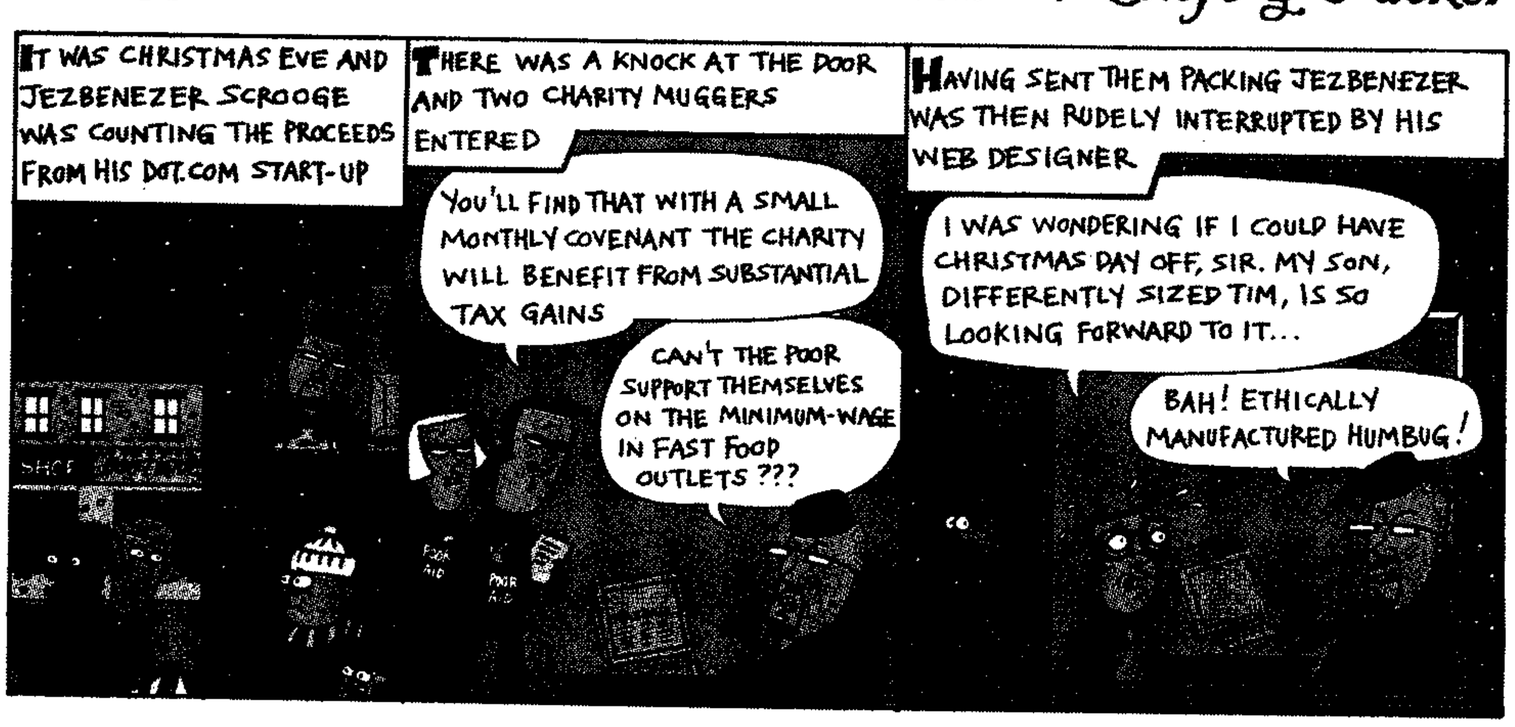
Correct me if I'm wrong, and I'm sure you will, but I believe that the BBC's constitution states that a certain proportion of its programmes (I believe it's 50 percent but I may have remembered incorrectly) have to be made outside of London, a ***requirement*** *which the BBC currently and consistently fails to meet. Furthermore, ratings figures show that BBC television programmes are significantly less popular in the north than in London and the south east. Change the group identities round a little bit and these figures would cause uproar (and the BBC would appoint a Tsar to look in to them).*

As Private Eye has pointed out in the past, for example with the new "supreme court" (PE 1165), the government shows, by turns, extreme largesse and extraordinary meanness. And it nearly always assumes that every new project, department or institution must be in London. The government can't make private businesses leave our overheated, expensive capital to create jobs elsewhere, but the BBC is a public institution which can take the lead in something like this and which, I believe, should do so.

Yours sincerely,
HARRY STOPES,

Crouch Hill, London N4.

A Grim Christmas Carol Part One — Knife & Packer


IT WAS CHRISTMAS EVE AND JEZBENEZER SCROOGE WAS COUNTING THE PROCEEDS FROM HIS DOT.COM START-UP
THERE WAS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR AND TWO CHARITY MUGGERS ENTERED
YOU'LL FIND THAT WITH A SMALL MONTHLY COVENANT THE CHARITY WILL BENEFIT FROM SUBSTANTIAL TAX GAINS
CAN'T THE POOR SUPPORT THEMSELVES ON THE MINIMUM-WAGE IN FAST FOOD OUTLETS ???
HAVING SENT THEM PACKING JEZBENEZER WAS THEN RUDELY INTERRUPTED BY HIS WEB DESIGNER
I WAS WONDERING IF I COULD HAVE CHRISTMAS DAY OFF, SIR. MY SON, DIFFERENTLY SIZED TIM, IS SO LOOKING FORWARD TO IT...
BAH! ETHICALLY MANUFACTURED HUMBUG!

Shome mishtake

Sir,

I feel I must register my protest at the supposedly comical newspaper cutting featured in Issue 1172, "Sioux chef required". It should have been obvious to the editorial staff that the individual who posted the advertisement was merely looking for staff for an Indian restaurant, and is therefore not at all amusing. All the same, I won't cancel my subscription.

Yours eternally,
ROBERT DAVIS,

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Pasta Solutions: the Ultimate Solution to your Pasta Needs" – *pasta*

"Pain Solutions Ltd: In partnership with Central Lancashire NHS" – *doctors and nurses*

"Imperial Place Tailored Leasing Solutions" – *office rental*

"Heating Solutions: the North West Premier Choice for Central Heating Installations and Maintenance" – *heaters*

"Spiritual High: wholesaler and distributor of drug harm minimisation solutions" – *legal drugs*

"Carmac Solutions Ltd: Your Solution's Solution" – *wheelchairs*

All submitted by readers

Out of orbit

Sir,

Unfortunately you have trumped the Guardian in believing that if something happens outside the M25, it doesn't exist (In the Theatre, Eye 1172). Occasional Guardian columnist Mark Ravenhill's new play, "pool (no water)", was reviewed in the Graun by Lynn Gardner on Sep 29, while it played at the Drum theatre in Plymouth. A momentary search on the internet told me that. And of course it was mauled – la Gardner gave it four stars.

ROBIN LEE,

Via email.

"I hear the Church has split"

Off-track

Sir,

I couldn't quite believe that Hastings railway station has been relocated "to a swathe of Kent" (Dr B Ching, Eye 1172); for surely even this government would struggle to re-draw a county boundary so radically before letting any of us know.

Sadly,
R. EDWARDS,

Sussex.

Bad egg?

Sir,

Is Ken Pyne a mole for the Grauniad? Every hack on that paper is under strict orders to slag off the Beeb, a policy supplemented by the number of clapped-out ex-editors who have been dragged in off the streets to carry on the good work. A cartoon or two from Ken about the financial and artistic cock-up which is ITV would definitely not come amiss. Oh, and I don't like your new format; when I turn to page three, it gets in the way of my fried egg butty.

Yours,
MIKE MITCHELL,

Hove, East Sussex.

Monumental folly?

Sir,

To seasoned Eye readers it can be taken as read that Piloti's complete and utter detestation of Norman Foster and Richard Rogers knows no bounds, so, on the face of it, no need for further comment, except to ask why those gentlemen have been so successful. Quite simply because they, unlike Piloti, are not "insidious" expressions of "global capitalism" (Eye 1172) but good architects, as their works in my opinion so clearly demonstrate.

Piloti then goes on to idolise the Cenotaph. Entirely misplaced in my view. Why? Because if anything the Cenotaph was an attempt by that mad monarch, George V, to atone for the sheer criminality of British World War I generals in gratuitously sending hundreds of thousands of men to their deaths. As for the Cenotaph's terrible inscription, "To our glorious dead", what can possibly be glorious about being dead?!!

Yours incredulously,
TIM HALL,

Via email.

Car-ping on

Sir,

I have been a subscriber for many years now and have – until now – manfully resisted the temptation to correspond with Pedants Corner lest my life-style be questioned.

However, Graham Kingsley in issue 1172 fails to make clear the incompetence displayed by the Saab advert.

A litre is, by definition, a volumetric measure and therefore the phrase "cubic litre" is meaningless and portrays a fundamental ignorance of basic science of those who designed and produced the advert. By the way, 1273 litres is equivalent to 2240.48 pints.

GEOFF LUDBROOK,

Via email.

Sir,

Your correspondent (Graham Kingsley, Eye 1172) is wrong to conclude that the Saab ad claiming a boot capacity of 1273 cubic litres is "pretty stupid".

On the contrary, it shows an expert grasp of multi-dimensional space (a "cubic litre" being a nine-dimensional measure) implying that the car in question has a Tardis-like ability to contain a large volume within a small external space. Rather clever, in fact.

This ad also belies the perennial techie gripe that humanities alumni don't understand the sciences, since the advertising copywriter in this example clearly displays a scientific understanding far beyond the curriculum of his/her arts degree.

I feel so sad for having written this.

Regretfully,
JULES ATTARD (FORMER TECHIE),

North Yorkshire.

Inn disgust

Sir,

Greene King (Pubs and Pubmen, Eye 1171) must be fast becoming the country's least favourite brewers. Down here in Kent, they have recently replaced traditional pictograph inn signs with just a large depiction of their logo in green on white; thus bringing to country lanes the same bland uniformity that bedevils our town centres. This is yet another example of the brewer's gross arrogance and insensitivity, both to the feelings of local communities and our national heritage.

Yours, who will be drinking elsewhere,
IVOR DAVIES,

Chatham, Kent.

Embracing new models

Sir,

The Daily Telegraph's forays into podcasting reveal an established presence in traditional media enthusiastically embracing younger and ostensibly more attractive forms. Can your archive throw up any similar examples?

Yours,
IAN APPLEBY,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"If they are aware of it, they'll be oblivious of it."

DAVID PLEAT, Radio 5 Live
(Malcolm Todd)

"Since last year we've raised the goalposts."

CHRISTINE GILBERT (Chief Inspector of Schools), Radio 5 Live
(John Yeo)

"It was a very hot potato at the time. We thought we'd put it to bed, but to have it regurgitated now is pointless."

STEVE COPPELL, Sky Sports News
(Julian Thake)

"I'm looking forward to anticipating this match."

Commentator, Talk Sport Radio
(Michael Charalambous)

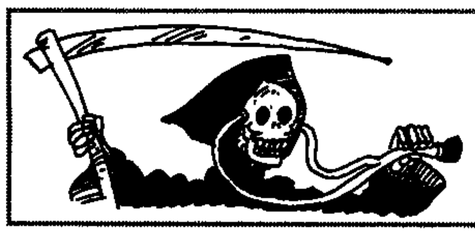
"I feel we're at the very precipice of a runaway train."

Radio 4
(Christopher Whitton)

A Grim Christmas Carol Part Two — Knife & Packer

THAT NIGHT JEZBENEZER CONSUMED A BOWL OF THIN FAIR TRADE LENTIL SOUP AND WENT TO BED. BUT THE GHOST OF HIS BUSINESS PARTNER, JACOB QUINLEY, APPEARED...
MIND MY AUSTERE BUT FUNCTIONAL RATTAN FOOT MAT!
QUINLEY SHOWED HIM THAT AS A RESULT OF THEIR RUTHLESS BUSINESS PRACTICE HE WAS NOW FORCED TO FOREVER WALK THE WORLD IN BONDAGE
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW HEAVY USB CABLE IS? NEVER MIND THESE LAPTOPS, HARD DRIVES AND MODEMS?
FINALLY HE WARNED JEZBENEZER THAT HE WOULD BE VISITED BY THREE GHOSTS THAT NIGHT...
I'M ALL FOR ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITY BUT THIS IS RIDICULOUS!

To be continued...



HEALTH SPECIAL

MEDICINE BALLS

Scotland the Naïve

ALAS, MD was talking balls in claiming the Scottish NHS would not repeat the privatisation mistakes of England (Balls, issue 1171). The PFI scheme is just as effective at plunging hospitals into debt north of the border.

The Lothian Health Board, which has to pay £43 million a year for using (but not owning) the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, has just refinanced the deal and tried to disguise this multi-million pound private sector bonanza as a coup – reductions in car parking charges from £10 to £7.

Lanarkshire has two PFI hospitals and is struggling with annual charges of £41m. The proposed closure of the A&E department at Monklands hospital attracted a high profile protest from its MP, John "hands off my hospital but bugger the rest of the NHS" Reid. It serves the poorest community and has the highest activity but is still destined for the chop.

The master plan for Scottish acute hospital reconfiguration was chaired by a group led by cancer specialist Professor David Kerr in May 2005. Its proposals coincide with plans to quadruple the amount of PFI debt from £475m to around £2.2bn across the Scottish NHS. The debts incurred will require a further wave of hospital closures.

In response to the Kerr report, Scottish Health Minister Andy Kerr (no relation) said: "I expect people to be consulted about the case and options for change, long before a preferred solution is reached." Curious then that the £15m contract for Scotland's first private treatment centre has been signed with no public consultation or parliamentary debate, and awarded with no competition to Amicus plc, a subsidiary of Netcare, the South African for-profit healthcare corporation.

Equally strange that the site for the Netcare UK project is at the NHS Stracathro hospital which, according to Andy Kerr, already has "existing available capacity in terms of theatres and appropriate buildings". So why not use it instead of paying Netcare? The answer, as with the English NHS, is "additionality"; a ridiculous set of rules which deem that certain projects can only be given to additional (i.e. private) providers and not the ones you have already (i.e. the NHS). The pretence is to stop NHS staff being spread too thinly, the reality is that it's a fast track to privatisation, especially since the same staff will be moonlighting in the private sector.

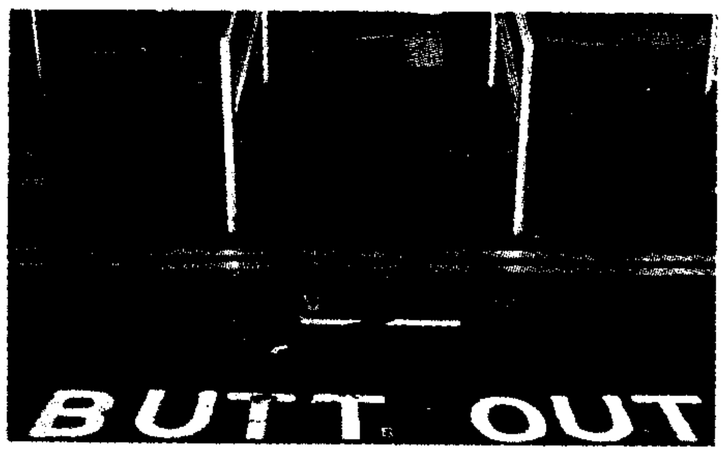
So why has the Scottish parliament swallowed the executive line that there has been "extensive engagement with the public and staff as the pilot project has developed"? Local SNP member John Swinney did issue a press release demanding more scrutiny but it was all rather pointless given that the contract had already been signed. The Amicus plc (Netcare UK) deal represents a significant change in service provision and should have had proper public consultation under the NHS Reform (Scotland) Act 2004. The only option to local protesters now is to mount a prohibitively expensive legal challenge.

"I probably shouldn't mention it... but I don't like the look of that mole"

Stop Press... More Bedford Balls

Dr Barry Monk, the consultant dermatologist standing at the next election under the "Save Bedford Hospital" ticket (Balls, issue 1172), is to have his department axed. This is apparently because there is no place for dermatology and its 8,000 patients a year, in an acute (Labour marginal) hospital. All skin lesions and whistleblowers will now be unleashed into the community. Watch this space...

... Even more Bedford Balls



'Butt Out' was emblazoned across the ground in front of the entrance of the hospital, the idea being to discourage smoking. This had the result of annoying both smokers and non-smokers who find the term offensive. And there was a worry Patricia Hewitt might take it the wrong way. In response, the management have arranged for a small letter 'S' to be inserted (see photograh), so as to make the point that they are referring to cigarette butts. Not everybody sees it that way. Not least the one in seven staff whose jobs are now at risk!

M.D.

Web of 'myths'

The latest attempt by NHS Connecting for Health to head off criticism of its failing National Programme for IT is a new "Myth Busters" section on its website.

Among the myths exploded is: "The project is plagued with delays." Everyone knows it's true, so how have the PR brains at CfH blown this one away? "The Summary Care Record, which will provide an electronic summary of a patient's medical details wherever they are needed in England, is behind schedule ... but substantial progress is being made on other parts of the National Programme for IT." As the care record is the great justification for the programme, the "myth" is in fact, er, confirmed as true.

Another winner is the "myth" that "the taxpayer will bear the brunt of problems with the NPfIT", busted with the one-liner: "Suppliers are only paid when they deliver, so the public purse is protected." In fact the central costs of running the programme on top of payments to suppliers are already thought to be running into the billions (back in March they stood at £580m). CfH refuses to answer the *Eye*'s request for up-to-date details, despite a warning letter from the Information Commissioner, and CfH boss Richard Granger's self-proclaimed "policy of sharing information openly". Now that *is* a myth.

Revolving doors

Few eyebrows were raised when Ruth Carnall, currently acting chief of the London Strategic Health Authority, left her job as director of the Department of Health's Change programme back in September 2004 for a series of lucrative consultancy posts, including one at KPMG.

Now it emerges that KPMG has long been one of the DoH's favoured consultants, coining in £14 million from the department since 2004/05. Among the firm's nice little earners in 04/05 were a "commercial directorate strategy and review", and a consultancy on independent sector treatment centres and the "NHS performance action team". Any connection between being awarded these crucial change initiatives and Ms Carnall's subsequent employment with KPMG must, of course, be entirely coincidental.

Meanwhile, as foreseen in *Eye* 1167 in September, the NHS's commercial director Ken Anderson has not hung about in the health service too much longer after an ad putting NHS commissioning work up for sale was pulled owing to "drafting errors".

Having overseen a boom in NHS outsourcing and other taxpayer-funded business for private health companies, he has left to become ... managing director of a private health company investor in the shape of Swiss bank UBS.

Among the UBS healthcare fund's largest investments is United Healthcare Inc, which through its United Health Europe subsidiary is already winning much NHS work thanks to the efforts of the NHS Commercial Directorate and its very commercial former chief, Mr Anderson.

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

FOR more than 70 years there has been a football pitch in the Hampshire market town of Alton. Used by Alton Town Football Club, it was established by Bass as part of a sports and social club for staff when Bass owned the brewery there.

When the brewery was bought recently from Interbrew by American drinks giant Coors, the new owners sought permission to build 190 houses on the sports ground. After Coors waved around an offer of £5m in funding for a better sports facility to be built elsewhere as replacement, Alton Town Council agreed, allowing the houses to go up provided Coors relocate the stadium.

So, where are they going to build it? On a public park. Alton Town Council is willing to give up precious parkland allowing a huge American company to flog off land it can't otherwise make a profit from.

Campaigners in Alton say the tree-lined Anstey Park is a popular open space for walking and other sports. An enclosed stadium, with licensed bar, car park and access roads, will eat up almost half the free access recreational parkland. And those improved community sports facilities? The council agreed to an artificial turf sports pitch (ATP) – very handy for organised team sports, although "community" use would come with a price tag. Coors' plan was for the ATP to be located at, er, Anstey Park, leaving almost no free access outdoor space at all. And, despite council suggestions that the pitch could be sited at a local school instead, there has been no such undertaking from Coors.

Letter from **Budapest**

from Our Own Correspondent

HUNGARY, famously, is the country without consequences, as our prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsany evidently knows. And it seems that in addition to being an Olympic liar, he is also something of a Nostradamus.

In his excellent "secret" September tape in which he candidly admitted "we fucked it up", he predicted of the forthcoming austerity package: "I think there will be conflicts, my fellows. Yes, there will be. There will be protests. There may be protests outside parliament. Sooner or later they will get bored of it and go home."

Sure enough, there were conflicts; and the demonstrators did indeed get bored and go home. Those of you who saw riots in Budapest on television may have thought they were a big deal, but they weren't. Yes, the TV station was stormed; yes a tank was involved; yes the police response was brutal – but it was out of all proportion to the small numbers involved.

Protests outside parliament were largely peaceful and attracted only a few thousand demonstrators for a few days. And now, having revealed that he "lied morning, noon and night", Gyurcsany's government is bouncing back in the polls.

Are we masochists? Sort of; but one reason the austerity package isn't causing too much revolt is that it's not really austere at all: the rich and multinationals are being stung for huge tax rises, while the bulk of the population continues to benefit from bloated public sector employment and random handouts. Only in Hungary does state railway offer discounted fares for monkeys.

This will certainly drive off foreign investors, but whether this will be enough to rein in the vast budget deficit is moot: already it will probably be more than 10 percent of GDP for 2006. Which means we'll probably join the euro some time after Sao Tome and Principe.

Nor will foreign friends be too impressed by police tactics during the riots. They were as unnecessary as they were illegal. Tear gas was used on harmless crowds; and even though the Police Act states that officers must display their police numbers, the helmeted riot squad did not do so. That may explain why they were happy to beat up protesters in front of the cameras. Numerous people were hit in the face by rubber bullets and several lost an eye.

Police use of extendible nightsticks was also… illegal. But the consequences? Zero. Budapest police chief Peter Gergenyi dismissed documented instances of brutality out of hand, and the government inquiry into the riots will not examine allegations of police brutality.

The 1956 uprising remains a sore point for the MSzP government, the legal successor of the commies who were still hauling us away in black cars as recently as the late 1980s. Then, Gyurcsany was head of KISZ (our Komsomol, or communist youth movement), and made a fortune from KISZ properties that he acquired after 1989, no doubt in a transparent and honourable way. So where a less confident man would have kept his head down on the anniversary of 1956, Gyurcsany decided to lead the celebrations.

Peaceful demonstrators who wanted to ruin the PM's big day in front of parliament were driven off with tear gas, while state television reported that all was well. Despite the riots, including the tank episode, by midnight even the few thousand who had turned up in the day were tucked up at home.

If you think this means Hungary is trundling into economic decline and banana republic status, you could be right. But most of us seem to say "whatever" – and there's the real reason our leaders get away with their atrocities and lies.

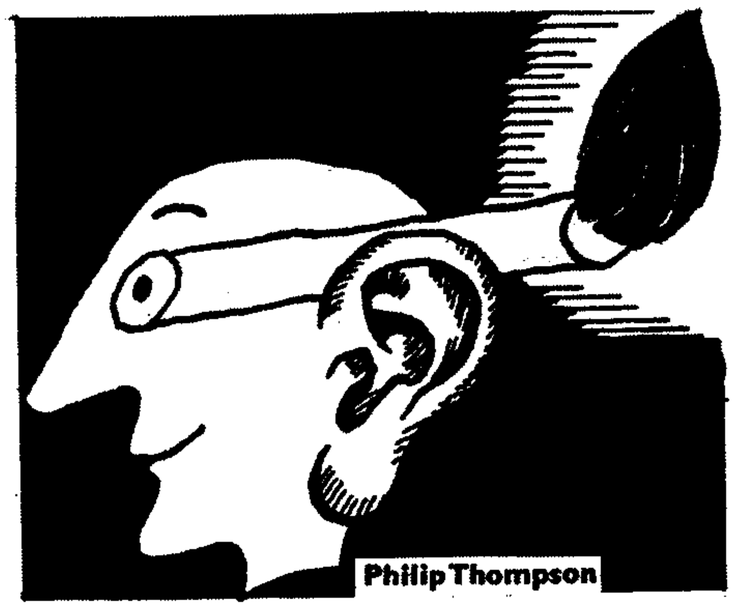
FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

Ear Candling Conference. 18th & 19th November, Reepham (Norwich).

The ancient art of ear candling, a powerful and safe healing method, which has stood the test of time, will finally get its true recognition. People from across the globe have found each other in their passion for the humble candle. Ear candling has been frowned upon for such a long time in this society that it seemed difficult to 'confess' one was involved in it. That is all about to change.

It now turns out that a great number of people not only are 'involved' with ear candling, but that amongst them are people who have done



serious research into the effects and workings of the candle. What to most outsiders still appears as a weird practice without any logical comprehension of how it could possibly work or what it could possibly do, has been investigated, probed and dissected. The fact that the people contributing to that kind of work lived far away from each other and felt isolated has now been overcome. They are joining together to share their knowledge and to discuss the future, based on truth, and not on stories passed on without ever being questioned. Not only do we now know that ear candling is a great help with conditions affecting the breathing, the five senses, the lymphatic drainage, and the immune system, but we now are about to find out HOW IT DOES ALL OF THAT.

The cost of the weekend, including lunches and refreshments during the day, is £90 per person. (Eco Echo, October 2006. Spotter: Charlotte and Sol Philcox)

–o–

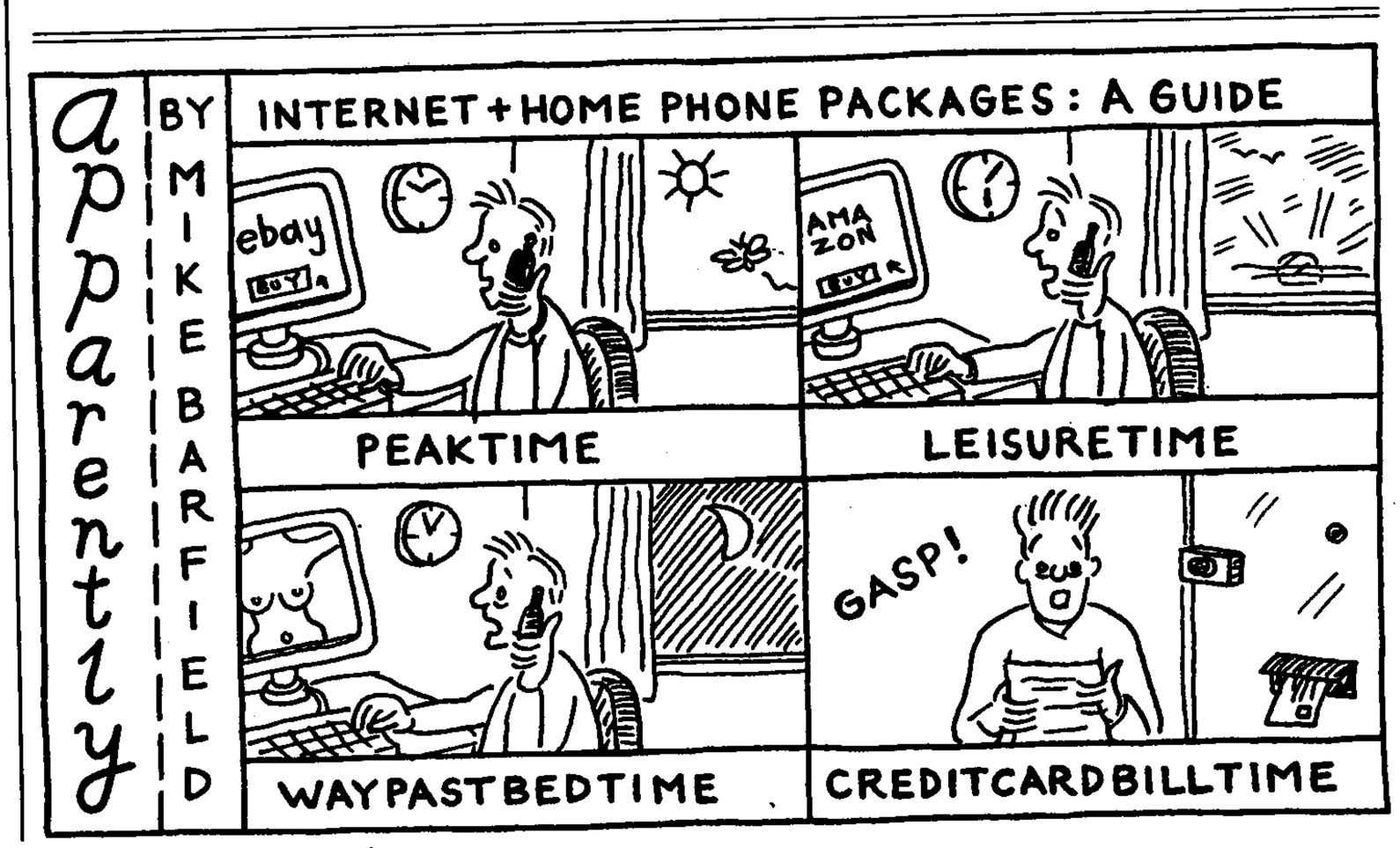
"Being abducted by aliens is a traumatic experience," Jens Lorek told reporters in the offices of his legal practice in Dresden, "and the government should be offering financial help. Extra-terrestrial watchdogs report hundreds of alien assaults each year, and there's obviously a huge demand for legal advice amongst victims of the creatures from outer space. The trouble is, in the past, people have been afraid of appearing foolish by talking about what has happened to them and asking the court to award compensation. But now I am offering to fight their cases on a no-win no-fee basis, to obtain redress from the state on their behalf.

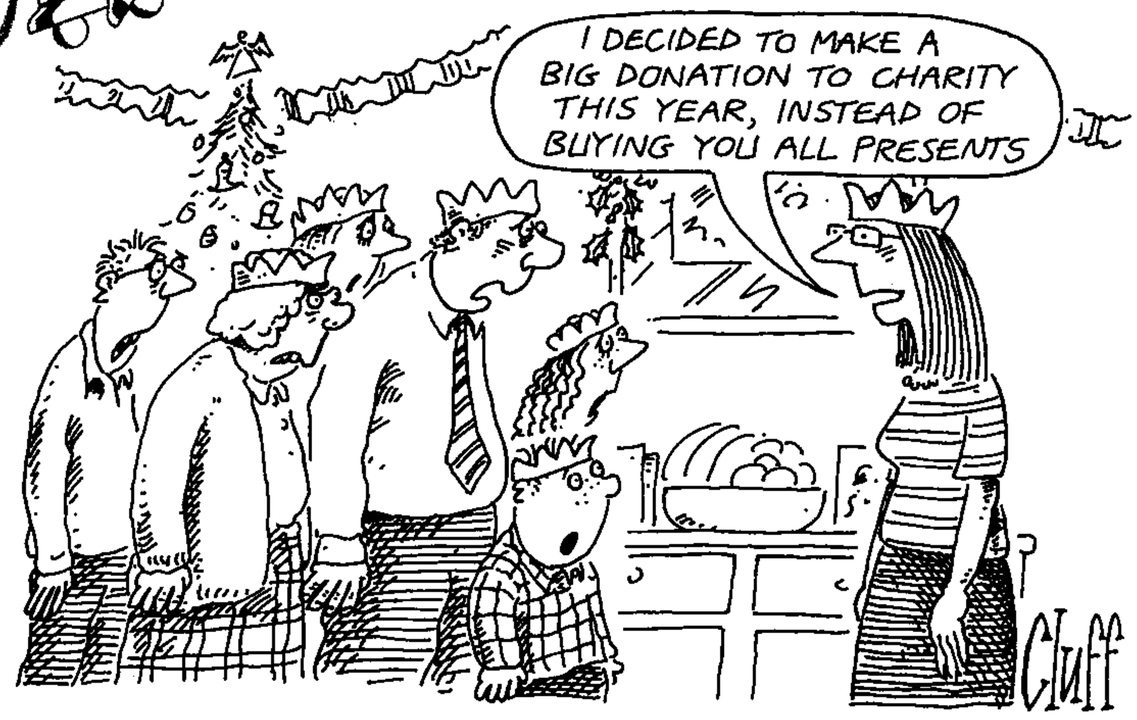
"People who have been abducted commonly experience time loss, discover unusual markings on their bodies, and find themselves having flashbacks to being anally probed or forced to mate. Victims could stand to win major remuneration from the government, on the grounds that it has failed in its duty to protect German citizens from alien abduction. The state has an obligation to rehabilitate these people, and should be funding therapies and cures for them. Call me a spaceship-chasing lawyer if you will, but there is clearly a gap in the compensation market here, which I intend to fill." *(Deutsche Welle, 6/10/06. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

–o–

"It is a basic human right for a boy not to have to sit down like a girl to urinate," Vidar Kleppe, the leader of the Democrats Party, told a rally in Kristiansand. "When boys are not allowed to pee in the natural way, the way boys have done for generations, it is meddling with God's work. This decision must be urgently debated by the executive committee of the area council, and then reversed. It's political correctness gone mad."

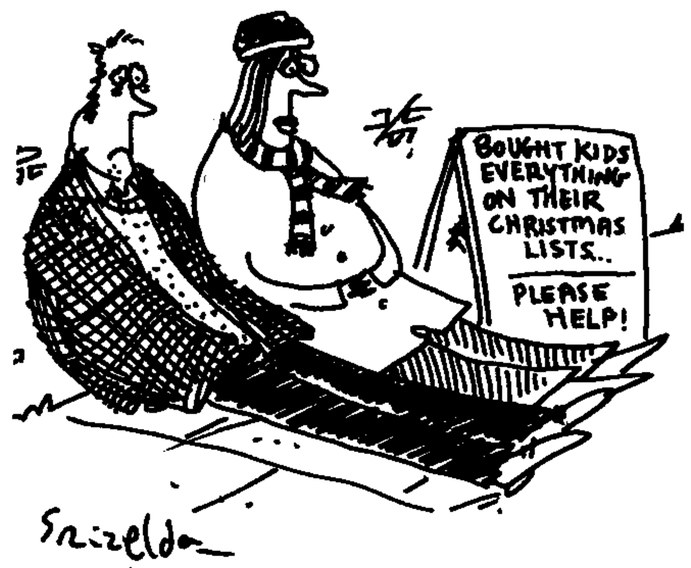
Kleppe was protesting against a ruling by Dvergsnes School that boys must sit on lavatory seats when urinating, and not stand. The school's principal, Lise Gjul, expressed "regret if anyone is offended by the ban, but it has nothing to do with political correctness. The problem is simply that young boys are not good enough at aiming when they stand. We only have space for one restroom, so it has to be used by both boys and girls. And we want it to be a pleasant toilet, not one that is splashed, stained, and stinking of urine." *(Faedrelandsvennen [Norway], 27/9/06. Spotter: Darren Ingram)*



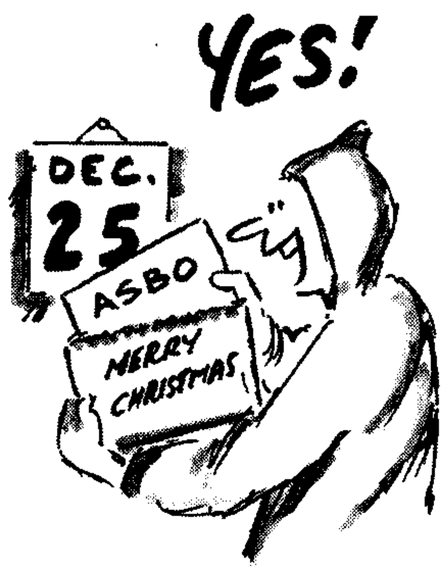


"Certainly, Madam – it's Christmas time"

"Bling and aromatherapy? I think one of us should have got him a mobile..."



"It's a postcode lottery, but we can't afford a more comprehensive service"



"The Hendersons want us to know that their seasonal newsletter is available to download as a podcast"

"You must come over to us on Boxing Day"

"Really? Gosh! I can't believe Holly and Ivy are both full grown"

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And my text today is taken from the gospel according to St Elton John The Divine, Chapter 7, v. 3, "Sorry seems to be the hardest word".

And, to be honest, it is, isn't it? Especially when you're being asked to say sorry for something that you didn't do! Like slavery!

But there are times when someone has to be man enough to stand up and say "sorry" for what other people have done, because they aren't man enough to say "sorry" themselves because they died 200 years ago!

But even if they hadn't died, and they were still around to say "sorry", they probably wouldn't do so, because they're not that kind of guy – unlike me!

And, hey, I'm not just talking about slavery here, although obviously that was really bad!

But there are plenty of other things that happened a long time ago (before 1997!) which were also very bad, and which it really is time we said we feel sorry about.

Let me suggest to you a few things that I want to say "sorry" about; and I hope you will too:

- The Victorians sending little children up chimneys! Can you think of anything more horrible than that (apart, of course, from slavery)?
- Sending all those poor convicts to Australia just because they'd stolen a loaf of bread to feed those poor, starving children who'd spent the day up a chimney! Can you think of anything worse than that (apart from slavery, obviously, and the potato famine in Ireland)?
- The 'Black Hole of Calcutta', Britain's equivalent of the Holocaust, when a British general ordered British troops to open fire on Gandhi, just like in the film? Can you think of anything more horrific than that war crime (apart, naturally, from slavery, the potato famine and the real Holocaust)?

I am sure we can all think of lots of other examples that you'd like me to say sorry for, and any more suggestions for future apologies should be placed in the box next to our new Fair Trade coffee machine at the back of the church, next to the multi-faith crib, which

shows the Three Kings visiting the Infant Buddha in Mecca (thanks to Mrs Jowell for coming up with that very good idea, and getting the children – eventually! – to do it in Sunday Club).

But I don't want you to get the idea that this saying sorry business is all negative.

I'm sure we've all got things that happened in the past that we have no need to be sorry for – and which actually, hey, we're perfectly entitled to be proud of!

In my own case, I'm thinking of my decision to join together with the Rev. Dubya of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons in his great crusade to free the world from the Evil One.

I'm hardly going to be saying sorry for that, am I? I mean, you don't say sorry for bringing new hope to the lives of all those millions of Iraqis who are lucky enough not to have been blown up!

And another thing I'm not at all sorry about, while we're on the subject, is the fact that we have been able to give one or two special privileges to some of those truly generous benefactors who have kept our finances in such good shape in recent years by making very welcome "loanations", as I call them, to Mr Levy's "Save The Vicar Appeal".

Whatever PC Yates might think, as he stands on his stepladder looking over the wall into my garden, I would like to make it clear that I have done nothing wrong and that the "Save The Vicar Appeal" has no connection with me whatever.

Sadly, I cannot speak for Mr Levy, and if PC Yates was to go round to Mr Levy's mansion, he might find all the evidence he needs hidden in an old stove. On the other hand, he may not!

I, naturally, would not wish to jump to any false conclusions about this very serious matter, or about the guilt or innocence of this rather seedy and disreputable hanger-on, and I wish PC Yates all the luck in the world in his understandable efforts to bring the guilty party to book!

So, let me end as I began, with yet another apology, this time to Mr Levy. I'm sorry I ever met you!

Yours unapologetically, Tony

PARISH SCENES NO. 94

The vicar shows that he can handle the spin!! Tony let some of the local St Albion lads try him out with a few tricky balls!! Said cricket expert Tony, "You think I've been caught out, but I'm staying in! Even if everyone thinks I'm a golden lame duck."

Parish Talks

We were delighted that the vicar's wife, Mrs Cherie Booth QC, was able to take time out from her busy schedule, giving speeches for charity, to talk to us about "Why All Journalists Are Loathsome People". Mrs Booth entertained us with stories of how the media had invented stories about her demanding huge sums of money for giving speeches on behalf of charities.

"These people have no morality," she said. "If they were asked to open a supermarket, they would probably go round stealing everything off the shelves!" The Chair of the meeting, Mr John Simpson, himself a very distinguished local journalist as Global Affairs Editor of the St Albion's Clarion and Advertiser, thanked Mrs Booth for her interesting talk and suggested that, by way of expressing their gratitude to the speaker, members of the audience should make a voluntary contribution of £100, or they would not be allowed to leave the church hall. Thank you to Mrs Blears for serving the coffee and walnut cake (and well done to Mrs Hewitt for warning everyone that the walnut cake might contain nuts!). T.B.

WHO IS THE NUCLEAR KILLER?

continued from the front page

and the fact that Mr Litvinenko had arranged to meet the former KGB (now KFC) agent Victor Lurkov at the London Millennium Experience, Park Lane, between 12 and 12.30 am on November 2nd seems to point to a possible link with rogue Russian security elements headed by Colonel Ivan Bumpemoff and funded by the emergent Russian dissident Mafia, including exiled oligarch Boris Johnsonovich, himself a close ally of former Putin friend - turned - critic Mikhail Buggarovsky known to be in contact with Italian academic and posssible triple agent Professor Scaramouche of the University of Fandango who until recently was working on a dossier with outspoken Chechen supporting factions operating from Paris.

This all leads to one startling conclusion. We have absolutely no idea what is going on.

SAUDI FURY AT CORRUPTION PROBE

by Our Defence Staff **Al Yamoney**

THE Saudi Royal Family were last night said to be extremely angry at the ongoing inquiry into accusations of corruption over the BAE Eurofighter deal.

Said a spokesman for the Saudis, "How dare anyone suggest that we do not operate by the highest ethical standards. If you carry on accusing us of impropriety we will have no alternative but to blackmail you." He continued, " Shut up or you don't get the money. Am I making myself clear?"

Full story p. 94.

DAILY EXPRESS

THE WORLD'S GREATEST NEWSPAPER FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8 2006

LITVINENKO MURDER: SHOCK NEW THEORY

by Our Crime Staff Phil Page

THE MOST credible explanation yet for the murder of the dissident Russian, Alexander Litvinenko, emerged last night after top Kremlinologist Professor Fayed spoke to this newspaper.

"He was murdered by the fuggin' Duke of Edinburgh who put a white Fiat Uno in his fuggin' sushi."

Prof. Fayed then went on to say that Litvinenko was about to produce evidence that the late Diana Princess of Wales was targeted by Smersh acting on the orders of the British Royal Family who *(cont. p. 94)*

A NATION REJOICES One Amazing Year

Private Eye's Cut-Out-'n'-Keep Souvenir Tribute To The Man They Are Already Calling 'The People's Old Etonian'

CAN IT be only a year since a youthful David Cameron succeeded to the leadership of the Conservative Party? And yet, in that roller-coaster twelve months, David has won the hearts of the nation with his simple no-nonsense, no-ideas approach to politics.

With his trademark bicycle helmet and chauffeur driving behind in a Rolls Royce with his top hat, David has completely changed the public perception of his party, dragging this outdated fuddy duddy institution into the bright new dawn of the 19th century.

And what are the highlights of the 365 days of David's "sea change" politics?

- An end to chocolate oranges in W.H. Smith
- An end to ties being worn unless people want to...
- An end to prejudice against violent criminals in hoods
- An end to the Tory Party.

And in a series of special events held throughout the country, Michael Gove will be opening a small bottle of sherry and *(cont. p. 94)*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam (possibly) General Pinochet and Fidel Castro

So. Possibly
Farewell
Then General
Pinochet and
Fidel Castro,
Chilean and
Cuban dictators
Respectively.

As we go
To press
You are both
Still alive.

Unlike all
Of your opponents.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

IN THIS WEEK'S
SPECTATOR

- **Is Laura Ashley in or out?** asks *Charles Moore*
- **Handbags. Big or small?** *Nelson Fraser* joins the big debate
- **Green wellingtons. Are they the new rock and roll?** *Peter Oborne* investigates

PLUS

What I did on my free holiday – *Matthew D'Ancona* takes a long hard look at how great Disneyland is.

THE SPECTATOR
Britain's top political weekly!

NIGELLA'S RECIPE FOR XMAS HUMBUG

1. Produce Xmas programme with self showing lots of cleavage, pouting, eating sausage suggestively, saying "I like it hot and steamy", etc, etc.

2. Give interviews complaining about being treated as a sex object.

3. That's it! Lovely traditional humbug!

Tomorrow: Nigella's recipe for cake. Having it and eating it

'RISING SEA LEVELS WON'T AFFECT BRITAIN' Blair's Pledge

by Our Environmental Staff **Greg Dyke**

FEARS that Britain's coastline would be flooded as a result of global warming were allayed last night when the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, announced that the United Kingdom had a unique fail-safe strategy to beat the oncoming peril.

Safety Blunkett

He said, "The Environment Agency has managed to procure massive supplies of the finest water repellent material sufficient to withstand a Tsunami-style assault on our coastal defences.

"We have millions of unsold copies of David Blunkett's diaries at our disposal," he continued, "ready to turn into mile-high sea walls within days. Tests have shown that this material is totally impenetrable and is more effective than sandbags, cement, concrete or even metal barriers."

He concluded, "The Blunkett Line, as it will be known, will run from Berwick-on-Tweed in the North East, right round to Barrow-in-Furness in the North West. I would like to think that future generations will look back in gratitude to my foresight in adapting this seemingly unpromising material into a supreme environmental triumph."

KILL-IN-THE-COMMUNITY Is It Really Working?

SERIOUS questions are being asked about the Government's 'Kill-in-the-community' policy after a report that only one person a week is being killed by the mentally ill.

Said a spokesman "We are letting all theses people out into society and they are only committing one homicide of an innocent member of the public per week."

"It's time to reassess this policy" he said "Since it is clearly not mad enough for *(cont. p. 94)*

That New A Level Paper In Full

Politics (A level)

1. Introducing the A* grade at A Level proves that the current system is working terribly well and doesn't need changing. Discuss.

2. Recommending the Baccalauréat instead of A Levels suggests a deep commitment to the current A Level system. Do you agree?

3. Is Tony Blair's Government performing a massive U-turn on A Levels after years of talking nonsense?

a) Yes b) Yes

Time to complete paper: Whatever

EXCLUSIVE TO THE NEWS OF THE WORLD

THOSE SENSATIONAL WILLIAM PHONE TAPES IN FULL

Sensational Call Number One

Wills: Love you, Snidge.

Fruity voice: Love you too, Snooks.

Wills: You put the phone down first.

Fruity voice: No, you put it down.

(continues for several hours)

Sensational Call Number Two

Wills: Hi Bro, Rupert and Pongo are coming over and we're going to get bladdered.

Harry: Yah, good plan.

Sensational Call Number Three

Wills: So what's happening to the plonker who bugged my phone?

Lawyer: He's going to prison for a very long time.

Wills: Ha Ha Ha.

COURT CIRCULAR

Friday December 1st

Her Majesty The Queen and HRH Prince Philip will visit a Phones-4-U branch in Oxford Street where they will be introduced to the store's assistant manager, Barry.

Her Majesty will attempt to return the Nokia 3100 the grandchildren bought her for her birthday explaining that it's been nothing but trouble. However Barry will explain that her Majesty cannot receive a refund as the phone hasn't been returned in its original packaging.

POPE SEEKS MUSLIM FORGIVENESS IN TURKEY

GNOME'S WINTER

PENSIONERS!

Lost in your own home?
Never again, thanks to

LAV-NAV™

This easy-to-use "in-home" satellite-based device ensures you will never again walk out of your front door thinking it's your bathroom!

Fits neatly on to stairlift, zimmer frame or walking stick.

Choice of voices: Terry Wogan, Joanna Lumley, Alan Bennett.

£359 (ex. VAT)

THE
PATRICIA HEWITT Horror

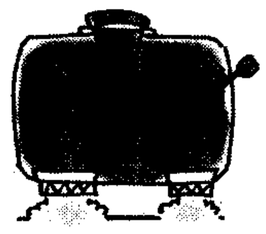
Terrify your friends and family this festive season when you go round and tell them that their local hospital is closing down!

Will they have a heart attack? **99p**

● *Hours of fun for everyone!* ●

AT LAST! THE HOVER-CASE™

No more wheels-stuck-on-step misery with this revolutionary new advance in suitcase technology. Simply flick a switch at the side of the case and – hey presto! – suitcase floats six inches above ground and then glides to wherever you want to go! Direct from Hungary, the home of Hover Innovation!



COLOURS: Grey Gowrie, Conrad Black, Yasmin Alibhai Brown
£2799 *(batteries extra)*

Lucky Stone of Chantelle

For hundreds of years the islanders of French New Guinea have looked to the Lucky Stone of Chantelle to bring them fame and fortune.

They believe that even the poorest and most humble native can overnight become rich and worshipped by millions just by owning this miraculous amulet.

Says one lucky wearer, *"Oh my God!"*

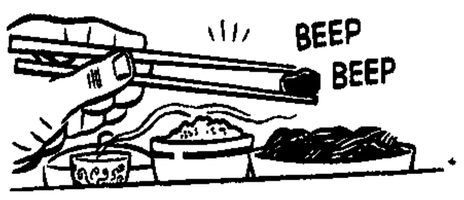
£1.99 (p&p extra)

Sushi Lovers! Say goodbye to Polonium in your raw fish with the

GEIGOSTICK 2006

They look like ordinary chopsticks but in fact they are fitted with the very latest in radioactive surveillance technology!

At the first sign of deadly nuclear-based poison your chopsticks will warn you by turning green.



Geigostick comes in a sealed lead case weighing 28 kg. *As used by the Estonian Secret Service.*

£4.99 for each stick (case £512 extra)

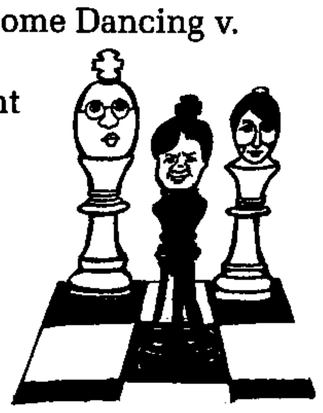
CHESS LOVERS
Novelty Chess Sets

Play your opening gambit with your favourite TV stars.

No more boring kings, queens and bishops – now it's celebrity checkmate!

Choose between these exciting sets:

- Eastenders v. Corrie
- Strictly Come Dancing v. X-Factor
- Newsnight Review v. South Bank Show



£999.99 (board not included)

Say Goodbye to Niqab Embarrassment with

X-Ray Veil Specs

USING the latest Infra-red technology from Qatar, these ordinary-looking spectacles enable you to look beneath the veil and see someone's face – without having to ask them to remove it!!

● *Says Jack Straw, from Blackburn: "If only I'd had my X-Ray Veil Specs, I would have saved myself a lot of trouble."*

Plays theme tune from Al-Jazeera's TV News

99p for three pairs

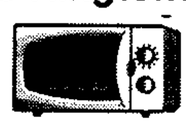
Dog Lovers!
FIDOPOD

Why should man's best friend miss out on his favourite tunes as he walks along the street or fetches a stick? Now Rover can join in the musical fun too with the amazing **FIDOPOD** from Taiwan.

Stores over 1,000 Fido-friendly tunes! **£999.99**

Your Own PERSONALISED Microwave Ringtone

Fed up with the same old 'Ping!' to tell



you that your M&S Individual Fish Pie is ready to eat?

Now you can download your favourite Ping-Tone direct onto your microwave and enjoy all the benefits of a personalised electronic warning sound!

CHOICES: Nokia Tune, Smoke Detector, Old-Fashioned Telephone, Door Bell, Classic Fire Alarm, Police Siren, Crazy Frog. **75p (per ping)**

Gnomes Past
THE MIGHTY CYCLING HELMET OF HERACLES

REDISCOVER your inner hero as you don this genuine-style helmet and cycle back into the time of legends!

This Bronze Age-type helmet is both historically accurate and fully compliant with EU Health & Safety standards!

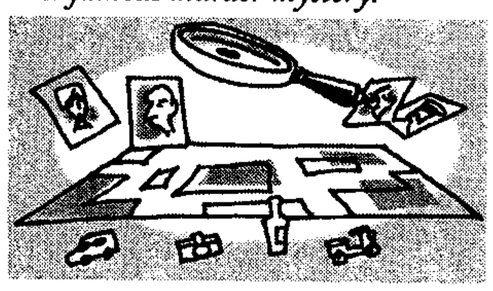
£3422.99

New from Harrods

ROYAL CLUEDO

Special 'Who Killed Diana?' edition of the classic board game. Now you can be Professor Fayed and say "I accuse the Duke of Edinburgh, with the White Fiat in the fuggin' tunnel in fuggin' Paris".

Hours of fun as you solve the world's most famous murder mystery.



'Brilliant' – Daily Express

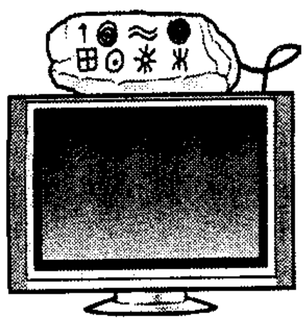
£10.99

VAL MAIL MART

Gnomes Past

THE Celtic DIGIBOX

Step back into the past with this authentic-style period artefact based on designs unearthed on the Isle of Sky.



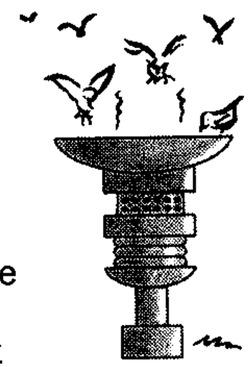
Re-live the bygone age of Druids whilst tuning into "Lost", "Man Utd v. Sunderland Live From The Stadium Of Light" and "Three Pints Of Lager And A Packet Of Crisps".

ONLY £734.77

Take pity on Cock Robin this winter with

THERMO-NUT

Just plug in, switch on and give your garden birds the 'hot meal' they deserve! Starlings and sparrows will be queuing up for their piping hot nut-fest!



Says TV's Bill Oddie: "There'll be no more 'blue' tits in my garden thanks to Thermo-Nut'!"

Plays Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*

£7,777.99 (WARNING: May not contain nuts)

KIDS! Enjoy the thrill of swings, slides and climbing frames without leaving your own bedroom with this

VIRTUAL PLAYGROUND

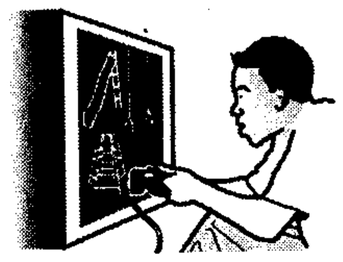
No need to exert yourself – simply point and click!

CHILD SIZE: Large, Larger, Extremely Large.

- Handset comes with 'coke and crisp' holder.

£678.77

Plays theme tune from TV's Jackanory



New from Latvia!!

The Pen That Thinks It's A Spoon!

- **Got a pen but not a spoon?**
- **Got a spoon but can't find a pen?**

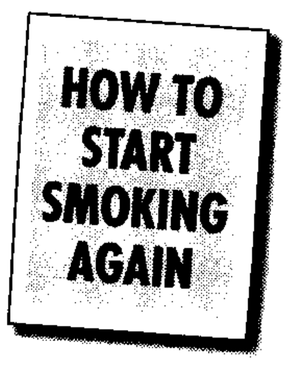
Problem solved with the incredible **'BIRO-STIR'**, which combines the writing action of a pen with the stirring action of a spoon!

35p for 12

WARNING:
Do not use 'Biro-Stir' with hot liquid.

Ex-Smokers!

The Book You've Been Waiting For!



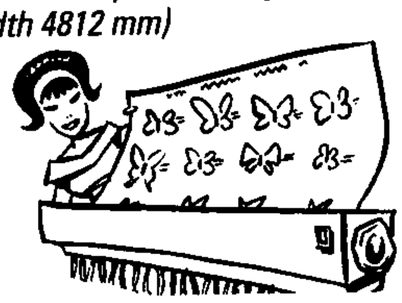
Top US doctor Reuben M. Blezzard MD has helped millions of people all over the world to start smoking again. In 12 easy-to-follow step-by-step lessons Dr Blezzard helps the former smoker to resume his habit without any side-effects.

£49.99

Say Goodbye to Unwanted Wallchart Misery with

CHART-O-SHRED

THIS amazing Finnish invention recycles your surplus wallcharts in a matter of seconds! Watch those Great British Moths, Fungi, Seabirds, Cheeses etc turn into ideal small pet bedding! *(Max width 4812 mm)*



£3999

- *Plays selection from Pink Floyd's 'The Wallchart"*

MUST-HAVE XMAS MUSIC TO WARM YOUR HEART

The Sound of Moscow

The famous massed choir of the KGB sing all your best loved seasonal songs in a feast of festive harmony!

20 unforgettable choral masterpieces from the Russian Secret Service Singers including:
'O Come All Ye Faithful'
'White Christmas'
'Edelweiss' and many many more.

£78.99

4x4 Lovers! ● Say goodbye to guilt about destroying the planet misery with the incredible

WIND TURBO CHARGER™

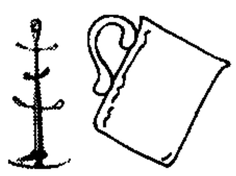
Developed by scientists at Cape Horn, this ecological marvel provides a globe-friendly alternative source of power for your "Chelsea Tractor"!! Simply remove engine, strap onto roof of any 4x4 and – abracadabra! – you're driving into Central London for *free*!

Plays theme tune from TV's Planet Earth

WARNING: Do not use in high wind

From JAPAN

THE BONSAI MUG TREE



YES! It's the world's smallest mug tree! Standing just 3mm high, the Bonsai Mug Tree is a fully functional mug tree and can carry real mugs on its branches.

No kitchen is complete without the decorative yet practical Bonsai Mug Tree!

A miniature marvel from the Mystic East!

£2.50 *(per packet of seeds)*

GNOME'S Complete Ethical Christmas Experience

Kit includes:

- *Organic Tree*
- *Wind-Powered Lights*
- *Bio-degradable Tinsel*
- *Fairtrade Pot from Eritrea*
- *Multifaith Angel*

£2,838.99

This year have yourselves "A Merry Little Inoffensive Winter Festival Time"!

Drivers! ***At Last! The answer to your hands-free problems! It's a mobile telephone... it's a baguette... it's the***

BAGUET-TEL!

No need to waste money on expensive 'hands-free' or Bluetooth technology as the Baguet-Tel looks just like the real thing!

Varieties: ● Ham Salad ● Tuna & Sweetcorn ● Ploughman's With Pickle.

Includes: ● mains charger ● car charger ● dashboard mounting kit ● stereo headphones ● clingfilm packaging

NB: after opening, keep your Baguet-Tel stored in a cool place.

Only **£299.95**

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

0831 hrs Emergency call received from a team of Neasden Council's recycling coordination officers (formerly binmen) operating in Milliband Lane, to report the sighting of an item of newsprint (eg, a page of the Daily Mail) which had been wrongly allocated to the green-and-yellow plastic bin reserved for bottles and jars. Six armed officers were sent to the crime scene to arrest the householder, a Mr Stephen Glovejoy, who under caution attempted to deny the offence, claiming that the newspaper must have been blown by the wind from a neighbour's blue-and-brown paper recycling bin. It was further alleged by the recycling officers that Mr Glovejoy had placed his bins on the kerbside in the wrong position, causing a possible health and safety hazard under the Placing Of Bins On The Kerbside (Health and Safety) Regulations 2006, and furthermore that he had done so a good hour and 30 minutes before the allotted "threshold time". Mr Glovejoy at this point became abusive, and the officers were forced to restrain him by shooting him seven times in the head. On return to the station, the officers were congratulated by Chief Inspector Kevin Paddington on their prompt action and bravery beyond the call of their performance targets.

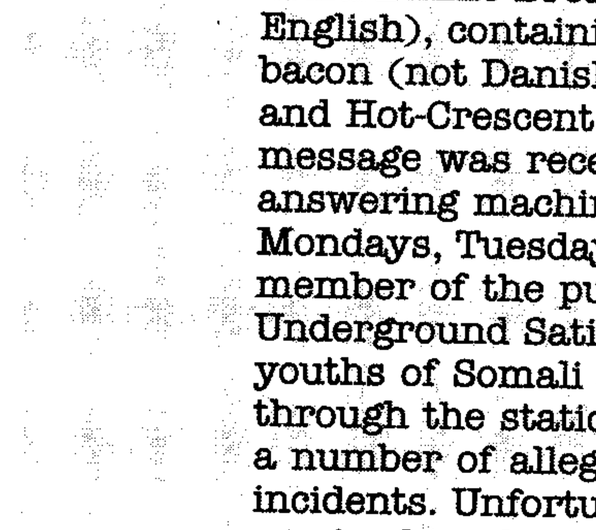
1015 hrs Officers adjourned for well-deserved Full Multi-Ethnic Breakfast (formerly Full English), containing fried egg and halal bacon (not Danish), Afro-Caribbean pudding and Hot-Crescent Buns. During this time, a message was received on the station answering machine (operates 24/7 except Mondays, Tuesdays and weekends). A member of the public at Willesden West Underground Sation had observed a gang of youths of Somali appearance, "steaming" through the station with knives and causing a number of alleged fatalities and rape incidents. Unfortunately, the message was received too late for any action to be taken, although efforts are being made to trace the caller, so that she could be prosecuted for racist stereotyping of the London African community and wasting police time.

1230 hrs A number of PCs and WPCs were detailed to take all available transport to Hibbert's "The Pet People" in Mary Seacole Road (formerly Wilberforce Drive) to inspect and purchase a number of officially-approved muzzles for the station's resident Alsatian dogs, Heffer and Littlejohn. This was in accordance with new Home Office guidelines which state that, to protect the human rights of criminal suspects, police dogs may only be deployed if they are fitted with a Type 40a Canine Jaw Restraint. The station dog handlers, PCs Perivale and Queensway, fitted the appliances to Heffer and Littlejohn respectively and were satisfied that the dogs were now incapable of inflicting any personal bodily injury which might lead to a civil prosecution or compensation claim.

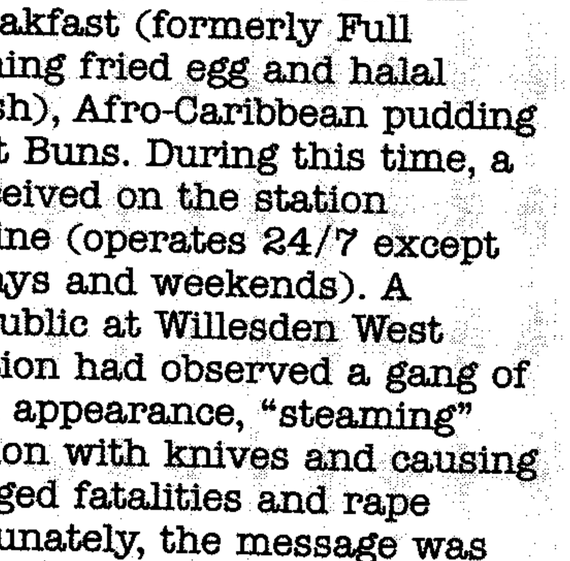
1400 – 2000 hrs Station closed to allow for the refurbishment of our two detention cells to accommodate 158 convicted criminals under the Home Office's new "Operation Fit For Purpose".

2132 hrs Report received from Community Support Officer Camilla Batmanjellybean that a large number of "thermostatically impaired" youths had been observed wandering round the Michael Meacher Community Arts And Leisure Complex (formerly Neasden High Street), wearing hoods, drinking alcohol from cans and inhaling hallucinatory substances. A number of members of the public had been threatened. On the instructions of Inspector Roger Fenchurch, 42 officers were dispatched to the scene equipped with bottles of water, both still and gently carbonated, to hand out to the deprived youngsters as a symbol of society's respect for their plight. A number of elderly bystanders were then arrested under The Counter-Terrorism Act 2006 for uttering inflammatory remarks about police handling of the incident. The officers involved then retired to celebrate this successful operation at the Ferret and iPod Public House (formerly the Admiral Nelson) which has recently been granted a 24-hour licence, which enabled the officers to continue their surveillance of the youths until 0430 hrs. All officers commented on the "relaxed, continental cafe-style culture" which now prevails in inner-city Neasden.

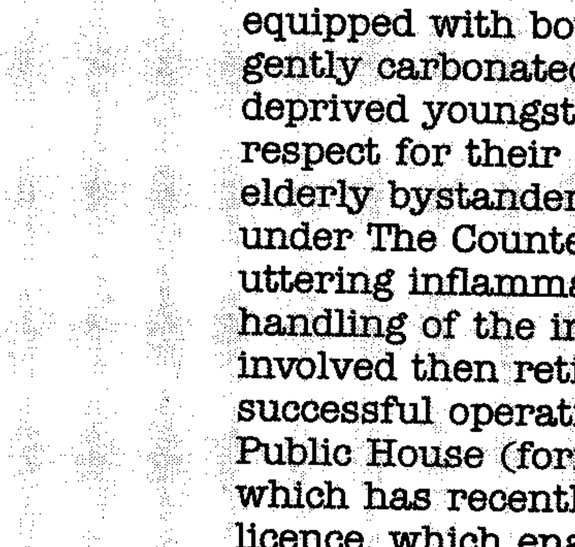
MODERN JAMES BOND



Bond infiltrated the poker game and lured Le Chiffre into a trap.



After surviving torture, Bond captured Le Chiffre and brought him home to face justice...



... where under the Human Rights Act Bond's evidence was found inadmissible, Le Chiffre released and Bond suspended pending enquiry

LATE BA NEWS

BRITISH AIRWAYS is attempting to contact tens of thousands of passengers after test on planes in Moscow revealed small quantities of airline food.

"Passengers would have had to ingest large quantities of this deadly substance to suffer any severe reactions" insisted a B.A Spokesman "at low levels such as those detected, airline food will only cause mild nausea.

However NHS Direct said it had already received hundreds of calls from worried passengers who has ingested dangerous amount of crème-caramel dessert.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Alan 'Fluff' Freeman, disc jockey

So. Farewell
Then pop
Pickers.

As you yourself
Might have
Said.

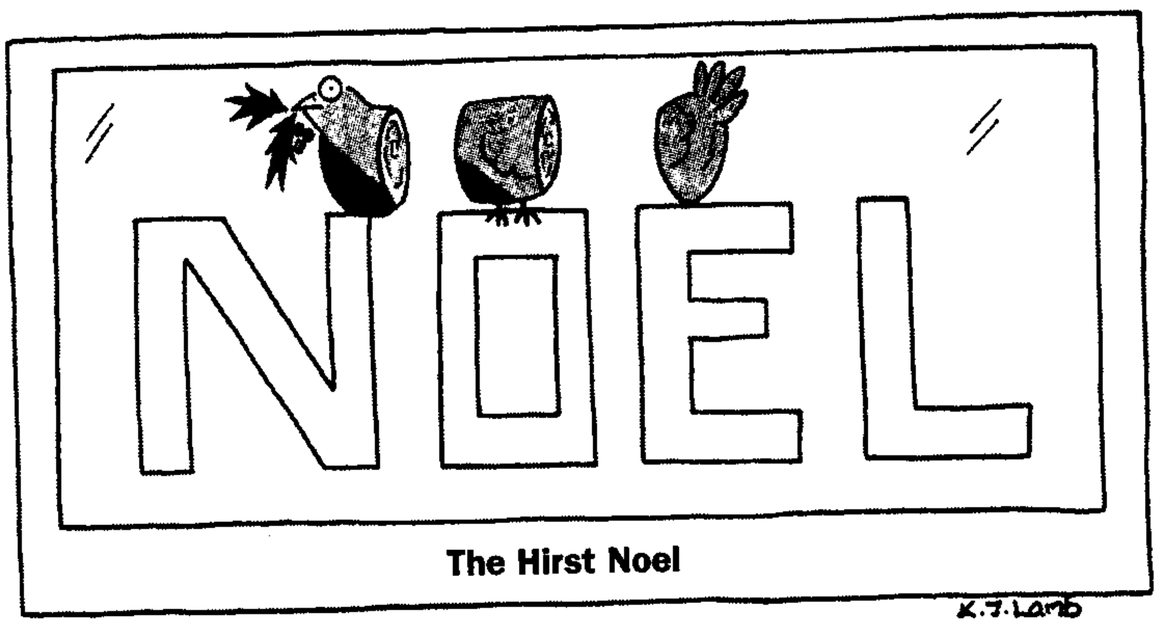
Sadly, your
Famous countdown
Has now
Reached
The end...

E.J. Thribb
(Number 17 and a "not 'arf")

THIS WEEK'S BEST-SELLING XMAS TITLES

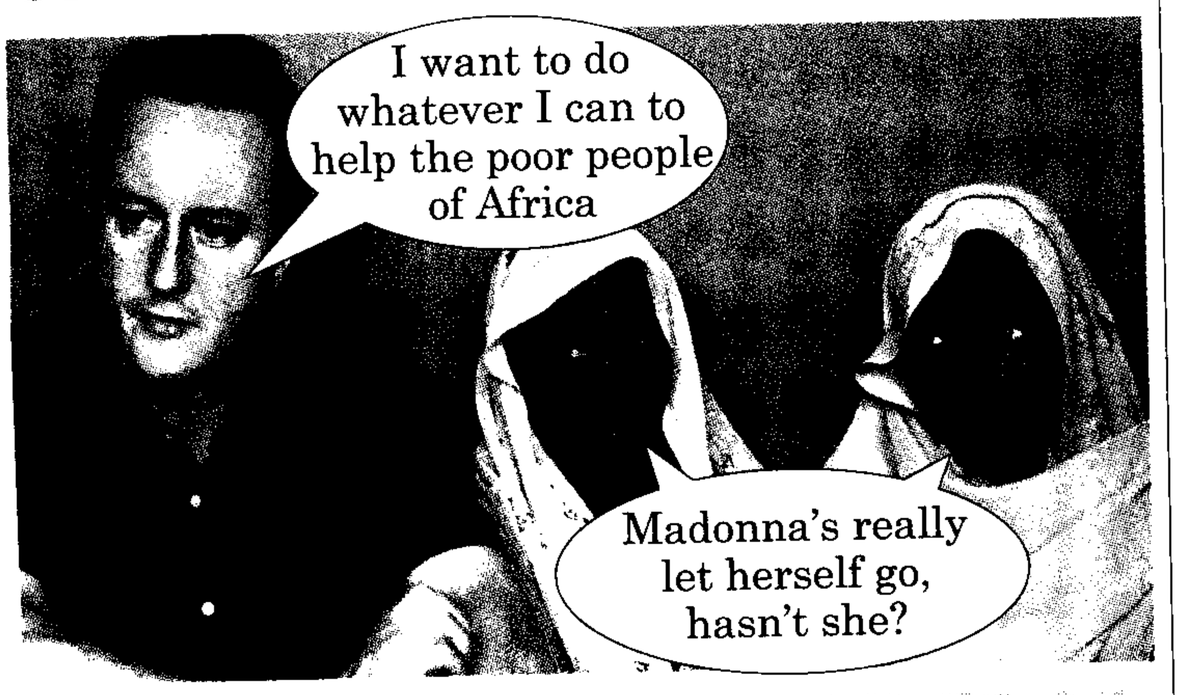
1. Did God Make Wasps?
2. Are Penguins God?
3. Is God Shit?
4. Is Richard Dawkins God?
5. Is Richard Dawkins Shit?
6. The Schott Book of God
7. God's Book of Schott
8. Is Schott God?
9. Did Dawkins Make Wasps?
10. Harry Mount's Book of Latin: "Amo, Amas, Amoney"

(That's enough Xmas books, Ed)



The Hirst Noel

CAMERON VISITS DARFUR

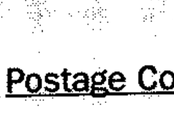


AN EYE GUIDE

Who really owns the Utility Companies?

Scottish Power	El McTricity *(Spain)*
British Gas	PutinGaz *(Russia)*
Thames Water	Yorkshire Water *(France)*
L'eau Yorkshire	Deutsche TeleFunk *(Italy)*
BT	Tehran Nuclear Fuels *(N Korea)*

My eBay



food-with-something-extra-Put-in (235)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-4 of 4 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **Junior Chemistry Set – 100s of fun experiments – make your friends gasp!**	£9.99	£2.99	1
☐ **Travel Guide "The Soviet Union", illustrated with 1950s views**	£4.99	£1.99	1
☐ **"Monopoly" – in dodgy state**	£2.99	£2.99	1
☐ **2 Slayer CDs, "Show No Mercy" "Reign in Blood" – a lethal dose of heavy metal!**	£9.99	£4.00	1

Items I'm Selling (1-4 of 4 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **"The Complete John le Carre" set of hardbacks – fair cond., some margin notes**	£15.00	£4.50	0
☐ **"Harry Potter" Official "Dobby the House-Elf" soft toy – unwanted gift**	£6.99	£4.00	0
☐ **"I ♥ Glasnost" T-shirts – all sizes, x 5m, still boxed – genuine reason for sale**	£5.00	£5m	0
☐ **"The Palladium In London" – theatre history book (bought in error)**	£4.99	£2.00	0

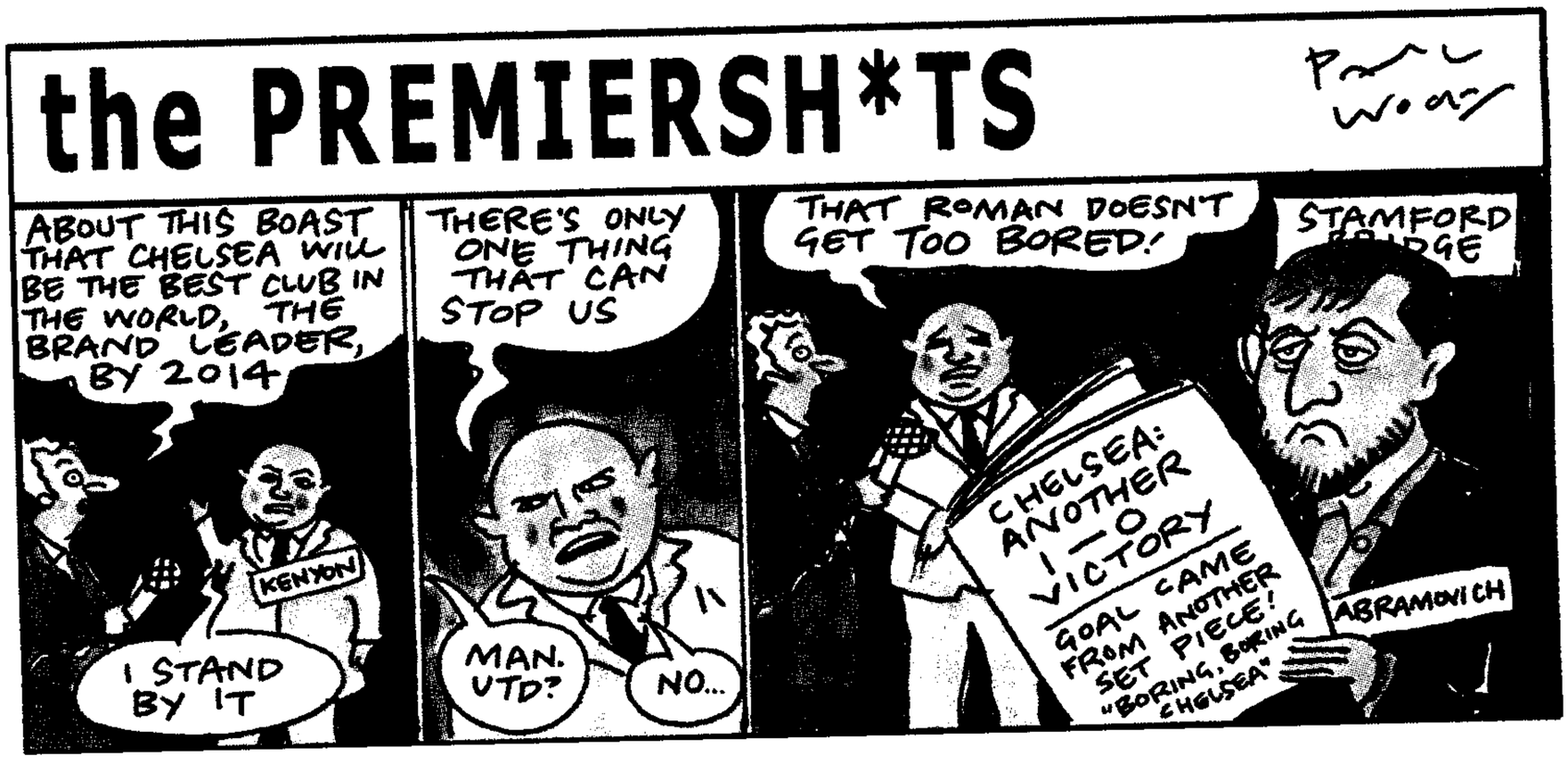
Late News

RAIL FIGURE BOOST

THE RAIL companies have welcomed news that they will be delivering double digit rises in ticket prices in 2007.

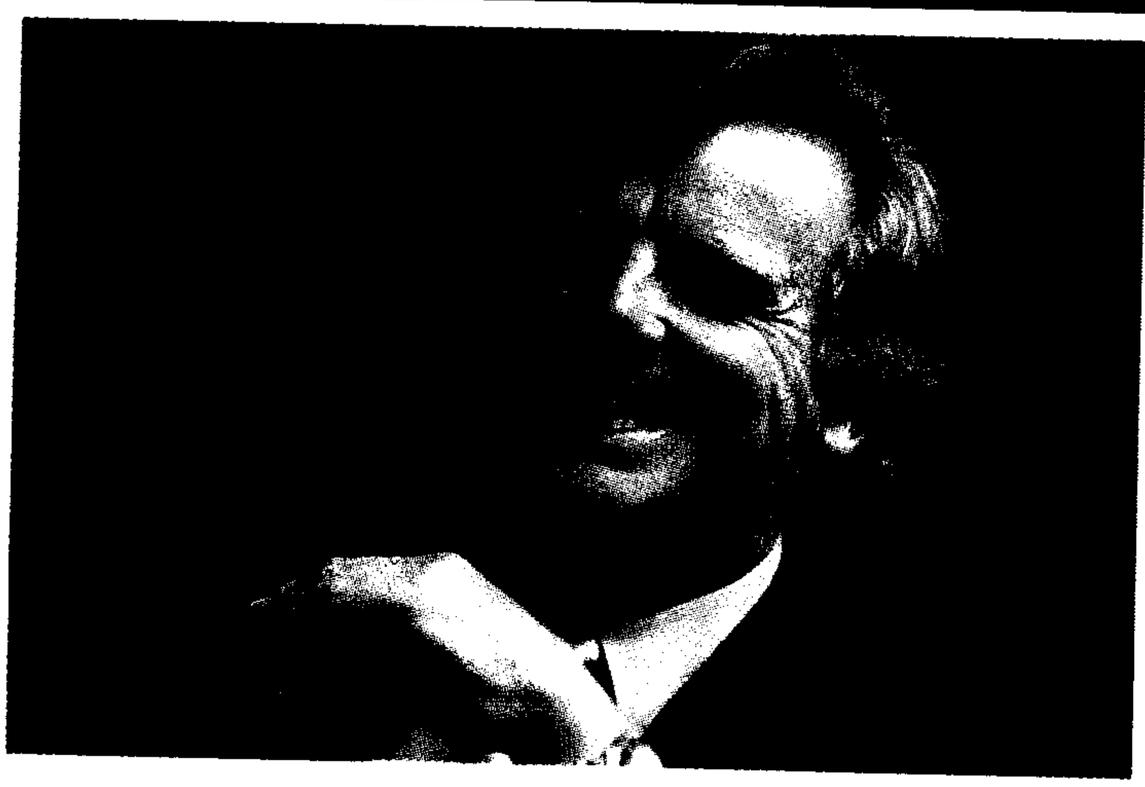
"We're delivering unprecedented levels of price rises to customers thanks to ever increasing inefficiencies in the industry which would have seemed impossible as little as five years ago", said a delighted Virgin/South Eastern/Arriva

(cont. p. 94)


the PREMIERSH*TS
Paul Woods
ABOUT THIS BOAST THAT CHELSEA WILL BE THE BEST CLUB IN THE WORLD, THE BRAND LEADER, BY 2014
KENYON
I STAND BY IT
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING THAT CAN STOP US
MAN. UTD?
NO...
THAT ROMAN DOESN'T GET TOO BORED!
CHELSEA: ANOTHER 1—0 VICTORY
GOAL CAME FROM ANOTHER SET PIECE! "BORING, BORING CHELSEA"
STAMFORD
ABRAMOVICH

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

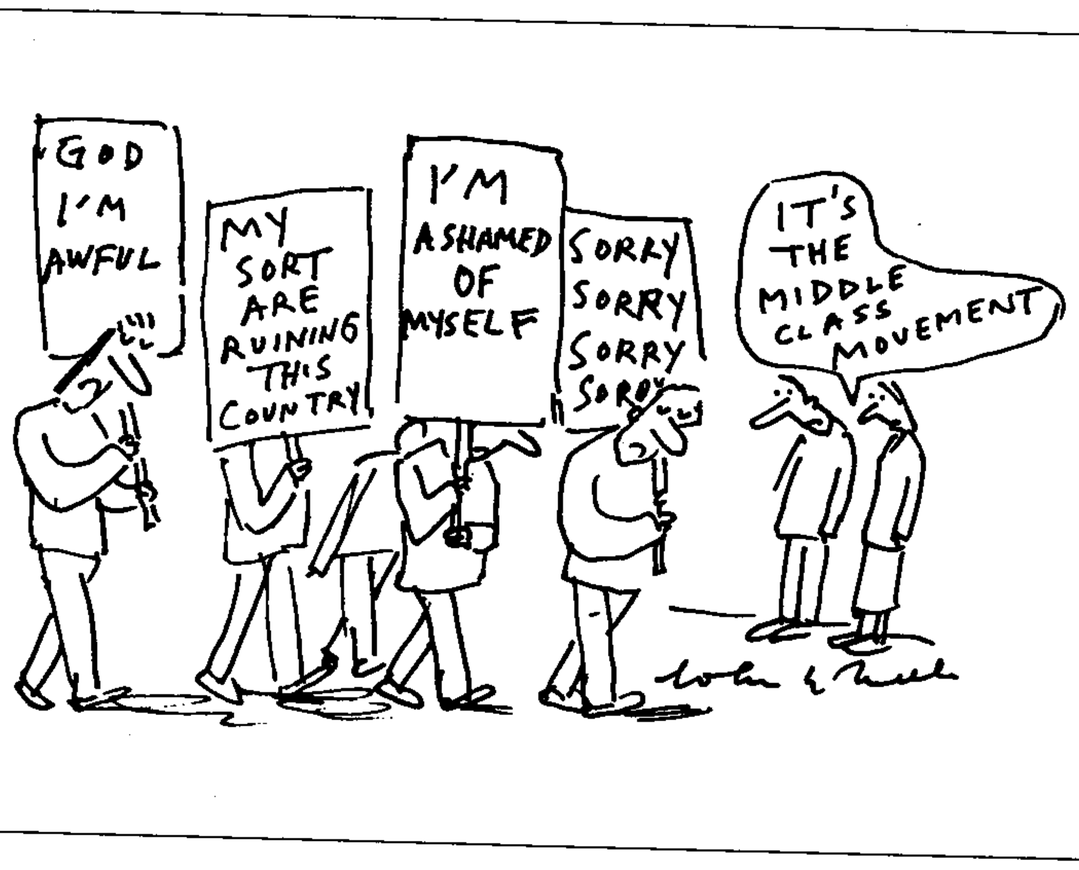
MOST IMPORTANT STORY EVER SHOCK



THERE WAS widespread surprise and alarm throughout the media world as a television executive moved to another job after not spending a lot of time in his last one.

"I can't believe this has happened," said every media insider. "This is completely unprecedented."

"The very idea of a TV boss just switching from one channel to another after a bare year or so... well, it's unheard of", added Mark Thompson *(cont. p. 94)*



Who Should Be The New Boss At The Beeb?

NOW you too can be involved in choosing the man or woman who you think should step up into the number one job in British broadcasting.

Should it be:

A. Sir David Dimbleby
B. Sir David Frost
C. Sir David Attenborough
D. Sir David Jason
E. Sir David Beckham
F. Sir David Cameron
G. Sir David Blunkett
H. Sir Peregrine Worsthorne

Just tick the name of the person you would like to see as the new BBC Chairman, and ring your choice to our premium rate call line 0870 870870 *(calls charged at £10 a minute).*

Remember – It's Your BBC!

Dear Sir,

As Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission, I was appalled to see an all-male shortlist in the above humorous article. I must warn you that you are in clear breach of the British Broadcasting (Non-Discrimination) Regulations 2005, implementing EC directive 2000/15 and could face prosecution unless you immediately replace it with an all-female shortlist as follows:

A. Dame Patricia Hodgson
B. Dame Baroness Jaybotham
C. Dame Elizabeth Manningham-Butler-Sloss
D. Dame Kiri Te Kanawa
E. Dame Judi Dench
F. The Baroness Poshella Beckham-Spice
G. Dame Yasmin Alibhai Brown
H. Dame Nigella Lawson of That Pudding

Yours,

The Baroness Deirdre Massingberd-Spart,
Commission For Equal Equality,
Via email.

Dear Sir,

I was really disappointed to see in your list for the Chair of the BBC not a single member of the gay and lesbian community. May I suggest that to avoid any unpleasant legal ramifications, you substitute the following all-gay shortlist, any one of whom would add lustre to the country's most important job.

A. Sir David Hockney
B. Dame Ian McKellen
C. Baroness Toksvig
D. Sir George Michael
E. Lord Mandelson of Primrose Hill
F. Lord Gilbert and Lady George (or vice versa)
G. Dame Maggi Hambling
H. Sir Graham Naughty

Yours,

Cedric Spart,
Co-Chair of the pressure group Stoneface.

Dear Sir,

As the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality and a sworn enemy of the racist Mayor Livingston, I wish to express how much I hate him.

Yours sincerely,

Trevor Phillips,
Chair CPRE.

YES, IT'S GOOD NEWS FOR ITV!

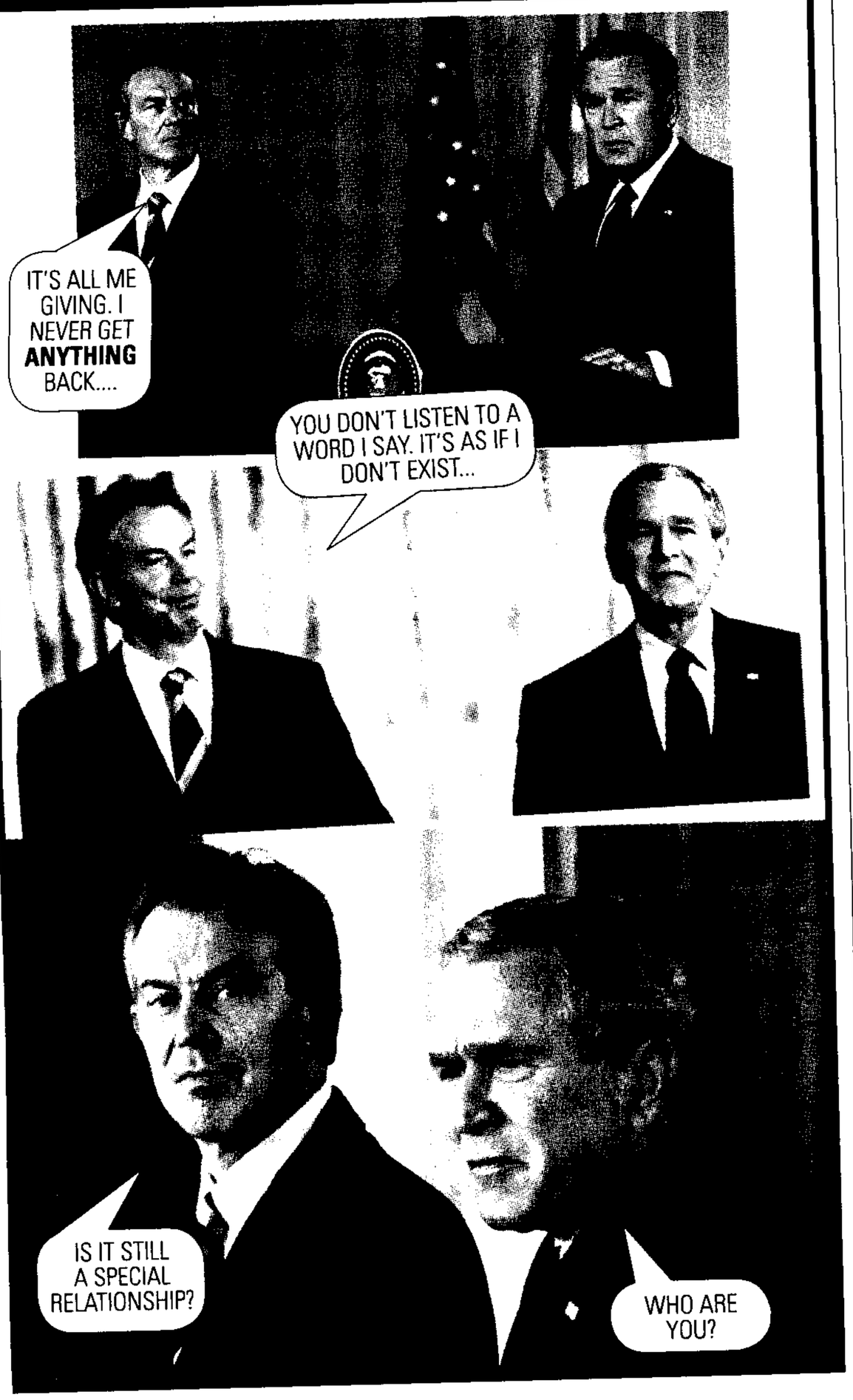
by Our Broadcasting Staff **Nick Chairman**

A HUGE revival in ITV's fortunes was predicted last week when it was announced that Michael Grade is to join the troubled channel.

Said an ITV spokesman, "This is incredibly exciting because it means that now at least one person is going to be watching ITV. This is a massive improvement in our viewing figures, a 100% rise from our previous share, and heralds a new dawn in *(cont. p. 94)*

Deidre's photo casebook

TONY HAS RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS


IT'S ALL ME GIVING. I NEVER GET **ANYTHING** BACK....
YOU DON'T LISTEN TO A WORD I SAY. IT'S AS IF I DON'T EXIST...
IS IT STILL A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP?
WHO ARE YOU?

New Revised Chinese Willow Pattern Plate

IS THIS THE BEST KGB SPY POISONING EVER??

CRITICS HAVE hailed the brutal, savage poisoning to death of Alexander Litvinenko as a real return to form for the KGB's "licence to kill" franchise.

"The sheer in-your-face brutality of the Litvinenko death takes us back to the classic KGB spy killings of the early sixties," said one astonished critic, "and that's why the public simply can't get enough of it."

The KGB admitted their "licence to kill" franchise had become stale and formulaic over recent years, with too much reliance on silly gadgets to kill dissidents, and that's why they had decided to go "back to basics".

"We know now that what captures the public's imagination are no-nonsense brutal murders like this."

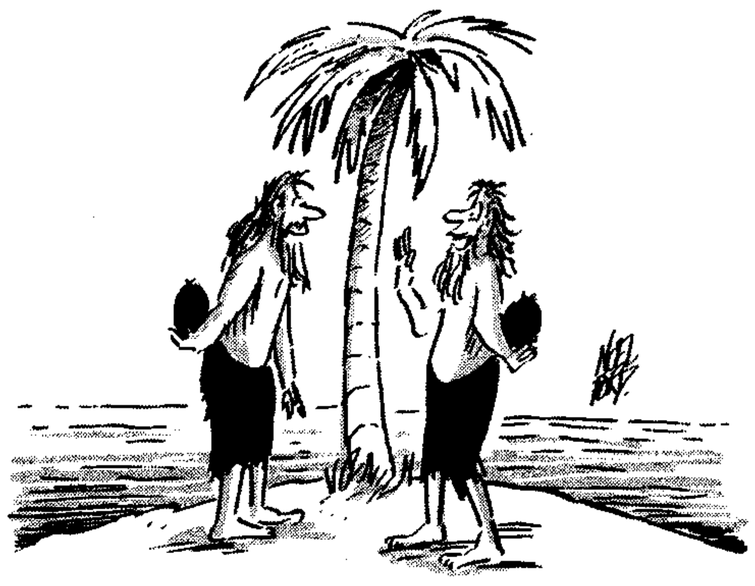
Redundant parting words in Grimsby

What You Won't Read In The Daily Telegraph's Amusing Correspondence About Things Their Readers Have Never Done

SIR – I am proud to say that I have never read "The Daily Telegraph" newspaper nor do I intend to do so! I have never heard of Charles Moore or Bill Deedes nor do I know what this "Heffer" thing might be! I am, moreover, thinking of setting up a society of like-minded individuals who are going to meet on a monthly basis in order not to read the Daily Telegraph!

Yours pompously,

Maria Von Trapp and others



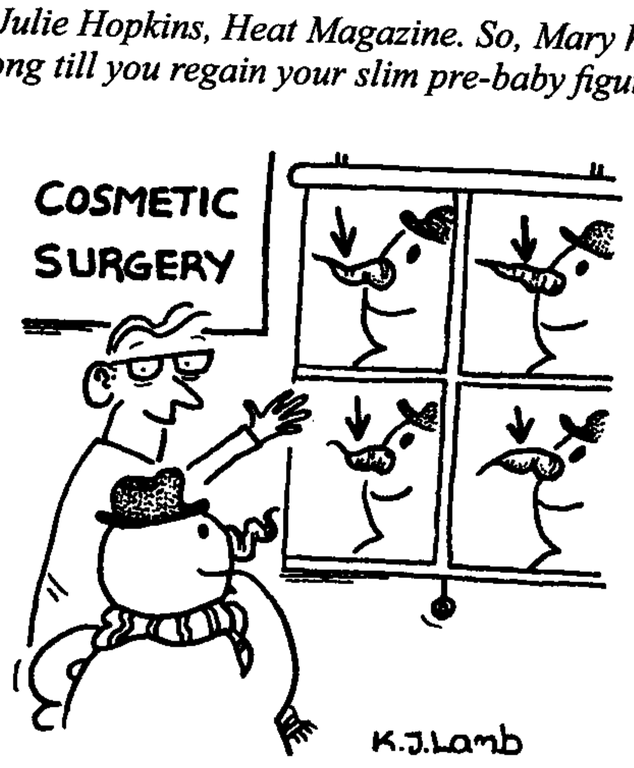
"My turn first this year – you'll never guess..."

I'VE BROUGHT THIS LOVELY CARDY...
AND I HEAR GREAT THINGS ABOUT THIS MOZART FOR BABIES C.D.
I ALWAYS SAY ONE CAN NEVER HAVE ENOUGH MONOGRAMMED BIBS!
MUZAK
JESUS

Twee Wise Men

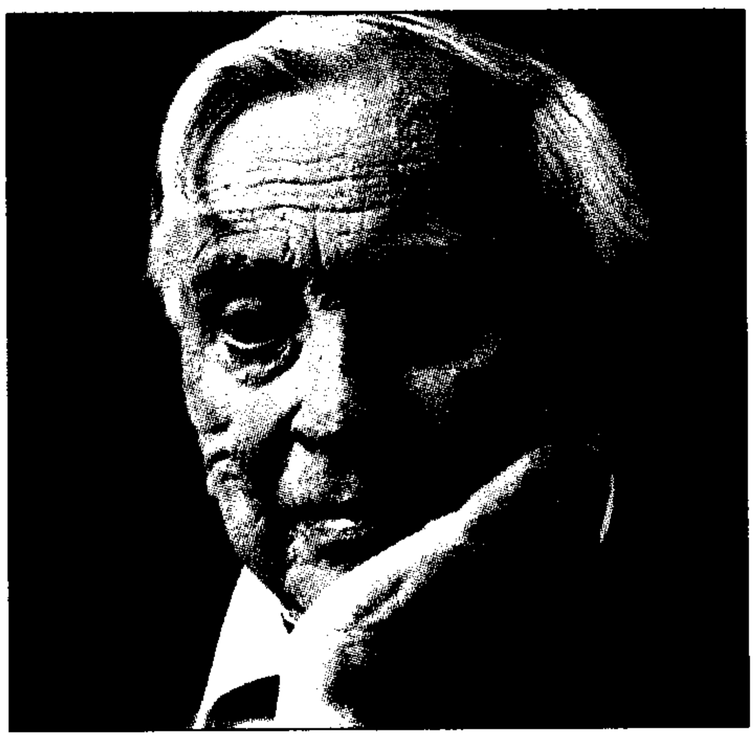
"Julie Hopkins, Heat Magazine. So, Mary how long till you regain your slim pre-baby figure"

"Christmas or not – you shouldn't put champagne in his water"



"I'm the ghost of Christmas past"

DIARY



GORE VIDAL

I have, upon occasion, been mildly diverted by those awkward lunges at wit performed, with such tedious regularity, by the present Queen of England, Lilibet, though in my experience royalty and merriment make the most peculiar bedfellows.

Neverthless, there are, as Montaigne used to put it, always exceptions. It was on a visit to Los Angeles to stay with my Kennedy cousins in the baking hot summer of 1947 that I first met King Kong. As I remarked at the time to my neighbour, Tennessee Williams, who had, as I recall, just completed reading Burr, my historical novel about the early days of the American phone system, King Kong was almost criminally hirsute.

Never was a King so unutterably hairy. Kong was also undeniably large, particularly when set against the dwarf-like figure of Margaret, Princess of England, seated to his left. At 90 foot, he was, one might almost say, too tall. Yet he proved himself a model of erudition. "I am deeply impressed by the cogency of the prose in Gore's new book and the liquid smooth style" he intoned, whilst polishing off yet another bunch of bananas as an *amuse gueule*. He then added, as an after-thought, "So very much better than Capote's half-witted last volume. Truman is, let us face it, the archetypal second-rater." I remembered the tragic, etcetera, news that Truman had died.

Apropos that considerable repast, I met King Kong on only one further occasion, when we found ourselves the guests of Evangeline Bruce, wife to our Ambassador, and friend of Lady Diana Cooper, who spent her honeymoon with the aptly-named Duff at Villa Cambrone, situated at the back of our Ravello house.

He was full of praise for all my books, in all their various editions. But he seemed to have put on weight, his clumsy way with tableware making him unwelcome in polite society. His long-awaited autobiography had not, to my knowledge, emerged from that furry head of his. What, I asked the poor benighted Kong, was he up to these days? He was hoping, he said, for another picture, but these days it was all sensitive family dramas, damn and blast them. He told me he had complained of it to Barbra Streisand, only the night before. Like my old friends Greta Garbo, The Duchess of Windsor and Albert Einstein, Kong was always the most tireless, not to say tiresome, namedropper.

Every time I ride in a motor automobile, the familiar twirl of the wheels transports me back to the singularly ill-favoured city of Dallas in the November of 1963. I had known Jack and his lamentably less masculine wife Jackie for years, though our intimacy had always, at my insistence, stopped short of the carnal.

At some point in the late 1950s, Jack and I had met to discuss which of us should run for the office of President. Jack had insisted that I was by far the better candidate, and whom could blame him, but I had informed him, in the requisite tone of mild regret, that the *arriviste* interior decoration of the White House was not to my taste, and thus I was prevented from accepting his kind invitation. Jack took little persuasion; he was never backward, as my old friend Princess Grace used to say to Eleanor Roosevelt when the two of them were *in flagrante*, in coming forward. So he had become President instead, in public at least: he tended to leave the day-to-day running of the country, and the major decisions, to my own good self.

And so back to Dallas. Sitting with the Kennedys in their showy vehicle as it solemnly ploughed its way through the bovine denizens of what I once memorably, though perhaps a little too humorously (!), described as the only city in America to rhyme with Phallus, I found the adulatory cheering of the crowds frankly embarrassing, as I knew myself to be stealing attention away from my hosts. Then a shot 'rang out', as they will insist on saying in the two-dime thrillers, and the white leather – or rather faux-leather (parsimony was a, perhaps even *the* Kennedy trait) – car seats were spattered with blood.

"Quel domage!" I purred to the distraught Jackie, as she attempted, with the panicky maladroitness of the female, to recover the remains of Jack's by now alarmingly unkempt head from the nether regions of the automobile.

Quel domage, indeed: my new suit had to pay an immediate visit to the very driest of dry cleaners. But one must be thankful for small mercies: assassination may be a nuisance, particularly if it is one's own, but at least it afforded Jackie a free lift to the hospital, and a chance, later in the day, to wear black – always the most becoming colour for her.

British politics has, from time to time, been a preoccupation of mine, like acne, or whooping cough. My expert view on your inconsiderable little country is oft required. It is a curious little off-shore island buried in sawdust, like the hamster, and, again like the hamster, it is best taken out and viewed only occasionally, and then strictly with rubber gloves.

I was the first to predict, all those dreary years ago, that, following the interminable reign of Mary Thatcher, Neil Kinnock would become British President: it was high time, I said, for a Scot to take over. Once again, I was proved right when at last Neil entered No. 10 Whitehall Street in triumph, accompanied by his ostentatious wife Norma.

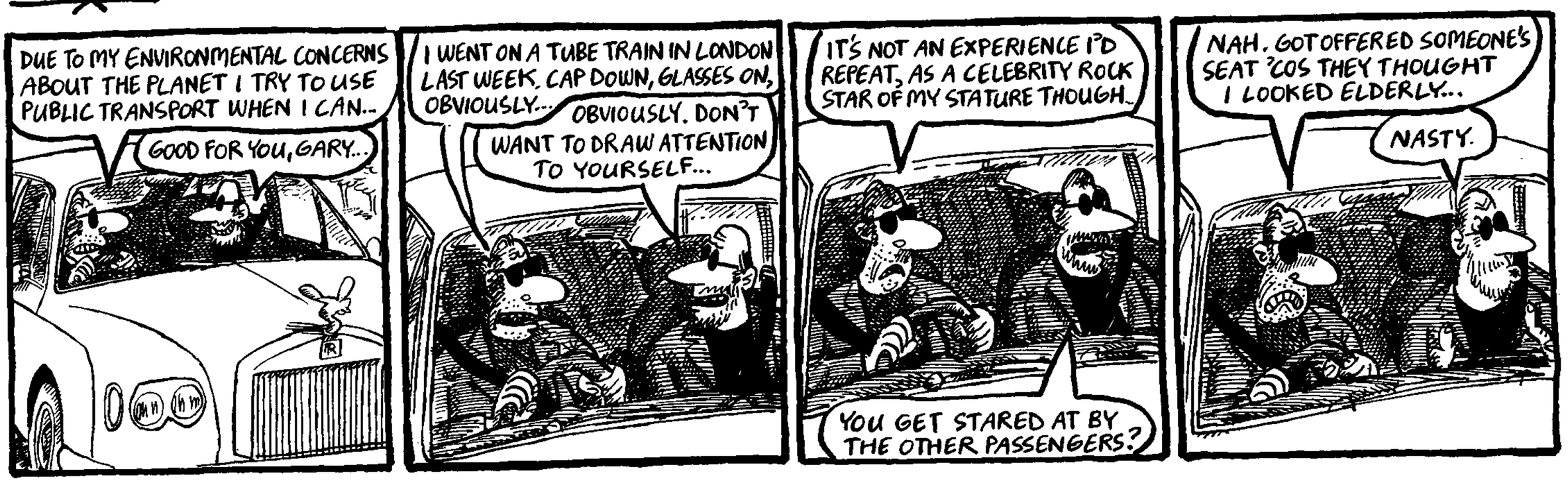
Many leading British publications and television programmes have, in recent months, sought my opinion on the likely accession of George Brown, the current Lord Chancellor. He reminds me, I tell them, of my old friend Gertrude Stein, whose grandmother was, of course, a second-cousin of my mother's great aunt's third husband. My own view is that George Brown will, like Jeremy Thorpe before him, be assassinated by the CIA in union with your British M25, when he finally makes a move to topple my third cousin, the witty and moustachioed Saddam Hussein, from his throne in Iran, a country which has become, under his benevolent rule, far too democratic for the so-called Western Allies ever to ignore.

Or am I going too fast for you?

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


DUE TO MY ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS ABOUT THE PLANET I TRY TO USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT WHEN I CAN..
GOOD FOR YOU, GARY...
I WENT ON A TUBE TRAIN IN LONDON LAST WEEK. CAP DOWN, GLASSES ON, OBVIOUSLY...
OBVIOUSLY. DON'T WANT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO YOURSELF...
IT'S NOT AN EXPERIENCE I'D REPEAT, AS A CELEBRITY ROCK STAR OF MY STATURE THOUGH..
YOU GET STARED AT BY THE OTHER PASSENGERS?
NAH. GOT OFFERED SOMEONE'S SEAT 'COS THEY THOUGHT I LOOKED ELDERLY...
NASTY.

Literary Review

Misspent dotage

Against the Day
Thomas Pynchon
(Cape £20)

DROPPED on to the bathroom scales, this weighed in at a cool 4lb. Its colossal length – 1,085 pages and something like half-a-million words of print – is immaterial. No one, a few mad academics excepted, is going to get much beyond a third of the darling work on which Mr P here has laboured for so long. As a literary artefact it is quite still-born, delivered frozen from the press, its only destiny the uncomprehending stare of some bewildered book-world historian, long years hence, who can be guaranteed to haul it from the shelf with a murmur of "My God! So that's how they used to write them way back when…"

What might be called the bonkers tradition in modern American literature dates back at least as far as the early 1960s. Pynchon himself laid down some of the ground-rules with *V* (1963), closely followed, and in one or two cases anticipated, by such luminaries of the form as John Barth (*The Sot-Weed Factor, Letters* etc), John Hawkes and William Gass. This new crop of Vietnam-era campus heroes differed from earlier American exponents of the big, buxom novel – Dreiser, Farrell and Wolfe – in one significant regard: they had no interest in the reader. These, substantially, were books written to amuse the people who wrote them, and if you didn't like it then you just weren't what the post-modernists were looking for, baby.

What do you need to know about *Against the Day*? Well, as very often happens at the tail-end of a longish literary career – the author must be touching 70 now – it's like nearly everything else Pynchon has written only a bit more so. Irritatingly more so. Set – well, notionally established – in that dense stretch of Yankee history between the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and the early Twenties, it has the usual bumper cast, all with deeply implausible Annie Proulx-style names (Chevrolette McAdoo, Sloat Fresno etc) and the usual seventeen plot-lines all going nowhere in particular with maximum dilatoriness: the Chums of Chance sailing out across the Arctic in their airship, Pugnax the talking dog, anarchist bomb-maker Webb Traverse, whose death at the hands of sinister plutocrat Scarsdale Vibe is just waiting to be avenged by his sons Reef and Frank. Groucho Marx and the Archduke Franz Ferdinand get walk-ons and the incidental lectures about such topics as Kabbalistic Tarot would make decent-sized pamphlets in themselves.

Well, we all knew that Tom here never operated on the "less is more" principle. However cannily arranged, this was never going to make a novel, for the excellent reason that Pynchon isn't interested in any of what Martin Amis once called the "staid satisfactions" – plot, pace, character and so on – of which most novels routinely consist. But does it, to borrow that other modish criterion of excellence, work as a performance? No, again. For a start, it's not funny. When Pynchon makes a joke he does so with an absolutely elephantine seriousness – inventing an Arctic intelligence centre called the "Inter-Group Laboratory for Opticomagnetic Observation", say, so that everyone can hilariously refer to it by the acronym IGLOO. It doesn't even work on the bedrock level of historical projection, because Pynchon, as in his last outing *Mason & Dixon* (1998), can't be bothered to do period dialogue, and either burlesques it or has his Feds ("Good work, Agent Basnight, another step up in your personal career ladder" etc) talking in twenty-first century slang.

No indeed, a few spectacular descriptions of landscape and scene apart, all we have here, bless us, is a lark: old Tom having a whale of a time enjoying himself (check out the pastiche songs into which the characters mirthlessly break out every twenty pages or so) without the slightest concern for the slack-jawed onlookers on the further side of the fence. Pynchon, famously, is the literary recluse to end all literary recluses: we know nothing of his personal life. But surely playing with your grandchildren, or listening to the whip-poor-will, or doing whatever it is that senior American novelists do in their spare time would be preferable to the eight-year graft that produced this gargantuan tub of suet, a work which not even the poor unfortunates booked to review it for the Sunday papers can bother to pretend to have read?

FIRST DRAFTS
no, no – it should go up a semi tone there
What about "I've loved, I've laughed, I've cried"?
..and do you think that's a big enough finish?
Pearsall

My Way

Books of the Year (Part One)

■ ALONG with the merry jungle of tills, the book trade is rejoicing once again in the time-worn traditions of log-rolling and back-scratching – played out, as ever, in the books-of-the-year features of the "quality" press.

To save readers' time and blood pressure, here is the *Eye*'s pick of the plugs…

Snootiest reviewer: "Only two new books impressed me this year… "(Robert Macfarlane, *Grauniad*).

Most blatant old pals' act: Kathy Lette's *How to Kill Your Husband* – "a very funny book" (John Mortimer, *Observer*); Mortimer's *Rumpole and the Reign of Terror* – "pithy and witty" (Kathy Lette, *New Statesman*). Runners-up: Jilly Cooper & Rachel Johnson; Craig Raine & James Fenton.

Best log-rolling, US division: Siri Hustvedt, picking Peter Carey's widely-disliked *Theft, A Love Story* (*Observer*); meanwhile Carey said Hustvedt's husband Paul Auster's latest was "maybe his best ever".

Haziest notion of "this year": As usual won by a *Spectator* contributor – Digby Durrant choosing the anthology *The Assassin's Cloak* (2000); promising work from Hisham Matar in *The Guardian*, praising a Penguin stablemate's book that's not out till March.

Weak at the knees award: Hilary Mantel, praising MJ Hyland ("When I met the author, I stared at her stupidly") in *three* books-of-the-year round-ups. Runner-up: Rachel Cooke (see below).

Best his-and-her coordination: Rachel Cooke, telling three publications that Edward St Aubyn should have won the Booker – echoing the verdict of her husband, Anthony Quinn, who was one of the judges.

Deftest family plug: Ferdinand Mount in the *Spectator*, picking Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men* ("within a whisker of winning the Booker and would have been a good choice"), published by Viking, where his daughter Mary Mount is editorial director.

Puffing own contributor: Dave Eggers in *The Guardian*, praising Miranda July, who appears in the current issue of his *McSweeney's* quarterly. Runner-up: Geordie Greig, whose *Observer* choices were thank-you notes to *Tatler* contributor David Hockney and recent *Tatler* interviewees Seamus Heaney and Martin Amis.

Puffing own editor: Chatto authors AS Byatt (*Guardian*) and Jane Gardam (*Spectator*) both picked *Nature's Engraver* by Jenny Uglow, editor at… Chatto.

Puffing own boss: *Vanity Fair*'s London editor Henry Porter, in the *Observer*, tipping a book by three authors including Graydon Carter, editor of *Vanity Fair*.

Puffing co-author: Colm Toibin, in *The Guardian*, admired *Bad Faith* by Carmen Callil, with whom he edited *The Modern Library*.

Most Faber authors picked by Faber author: equalling the record, four of six poetry collections Andrew Motion chose in the *Observer* – Simon Armitage, Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, Hugo Williams – were from Faber.

Jeanette Winterson award: a surprising contender – in the *Observer* Michael Foot (bizarrely billed as a "Labour peer") plumps for "the new comprehensive volume, *Orwell in Tribune: As I Please and Other Writings, 1943-47*. It is compiled and edited by Paul Anderson, a former *Tribune* editor whose special insights into Orwell's genius make this particular volume the very best on the subject." Anyone rushing to order it on the strength of this recommendation will find that the foreword is written by one M. Foot.

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S THE IDEAL GIFT FOR CHRISTMAS!
A DAMNING ATTACK ON ORGANISED RELIGION!
BEST SELLERS
THE GOD DELUSION
THANK GOD FOR DAWKINS!

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ ANNOUNCING the cancellation of both the book by OJ Simpson which was to have been released by one of his publishing houses and the TV interview to publicise it that was to have been broadcast on one of his networks, News Corp boss Rupert Murdoch denounced it as "an ill-considered project."

Well, as Murdoch watchers know, if there's ill-consideration being done, *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade must be doing some of it – and indeed, three days before the project was dropped, she had already devoted a double page spread to the gory details of the "astonishing 'confessions'".

"OJ Simpson stands with a knife in his hand over the lifeless bodies of his ex-wife and her male friend," panted thrilled hackette Emily Smith. "That's when he realised the knife was still in his hand. It was covered in blood and there was blood halfway up his arm." And so it went on for a further 1100 words – which was 1100 more than the paper devoted to the news that Wade's boss had decided to welch on the deal.

■ THE Guardian got itself in a pickle with its handling of the story of Ian McEwan's borrowings in his Booker-nominated novel Atonement from Lucilla Andrews' account of wartime nursing in her autobiography, No Time for Romance.

Baffled readers encountered a front page story in which the headline revealed the novelist was responding to the charge of copying from another book – but they were never told the precise accusation or shown the parallel passages. The accusing article (in The Mail on Sunday) was haughtily identified only as appearing in "a Sunday newspaper", and Andrews and her book went unnamed until the closing paragraphs of a piece that was largely a leisurely essay on McEwan's research methods.

Why the kid-glove treatment? Shurely not because McEwan is married to Anna McAfee, until recently editor of the Grauniad's "Review" section?

■ AT THE *Literary Review*'s perennially amusing Bad Sex Awards last week, Courtney Love presented the trophy to a young unknown called Iain Hollingshead.

Oddly enough, one of the very few links on Hollingshead's website directs readers to a website for another young writer, Philip Womack – billed as "the next J K Rowling". Could this by any chance be the same Philip Womack who, when not writing children's stories and acting as private Latin tutor to the Marquess of Normanby's 13-year-old daughter, works as an editorial assistant at... *Literary Review*?

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ HAMPSHIRE library service hit the headlines in 2004 when it became the main case study used by Tim Coates in his "Who's in Charge?" report on the decline in public libraries. The former Waterstones man pointed to the "out-of-date and poor" book collection and unhelpful opening hours as threats to the library service's future, while claiming that money was being wasted on the bureaucratic processing of books.

Hampshire derided the research as "wildly misleading" and "grossly inaccurate", and insisted that its new approach to providing "library, learning and cultural services in accessible Discovery Centres" was the right way to attract readers to the service. Hampshire has since spent millions on its Discovery Centres but despite plundering the book-buying fund to pay for building work (*Eye* 1121), the library service is currently facing a £500,000 overspend.

Now the county has announced that it is to cut one third of its 80 professional librarians, while Margaret Snaith, county councillor in charge of heritage and recreation, has earmarked another £250,000 from the book fund as a contingency reserve. So far no branch libraries – sorry, Discovery Centres – are to close, but that will leave the reduced staff very stretched indeed.

"Oi, David!" called Princess Posh. "Where's that pea I was saving for my lunch?"

Pseuds Corner

Lauren Porter's full size knitted Ferrari we find the fusion of the seemingly incompatible. The most aspirational of all consumer products is presented in the medium most quintessentially home-spun. The masculine is brought together with the feminine, soft with hard, young with old and the fast with the slow – this particular Ferrari was 10 months in production. If you were to ask what the opposite of Ferrari might be, could the answer be knitting?

The beauty of this piece is not just in the simplicity with which these associations and stereotypes are challenged; the positivity with which Lauren raises these questions is just as immediate...*[continues]*

Press release from Sarah Myerscough Fine Art

He takes a scone and puts on cream, then jam. It's the final evocation of cool and utter rightness – and it could so easily have gone the other way. Jam then cream, a dainty disaster.

A.A. GILL takes tea with JARVIS COCKER, *Sunday Times*

What prompted you to film people vomiting?
I've been doing a lot of talks lately and the idea came from trying to talk about working – turning feelings, thoughts, desires, hopes and ideas into something to show other people. Vomiting is a good example of trying to get something from the inside out; it's painful and making work can be painful too; it's also uncontrollable. I want to make work that is more like a vomit than a rumination... Vomiting is a very simple form of expression; it's a reflex that bypasses the thinking process and, since I made the film, I've been thinking a lot about acting. I find myself repeating myself, because it's so difficult to make things fresh each time. The 'Sick Film' is an attempt to make a fresh thing never made before – a work without prejudice and without hope.

Turner Prize winner MARTIN CREED, *Time Out*

And your worst experience on holiday?
Losing our luggage in Rome wasn't much fun. Luckily we use Louis Vuitton luggage with a big red ribbon on it, so ours was easily identifiable.

BARBARA TAYLOR BRADFORD, 'Heaven and Hell', *Daily Telegraph*

A phrase I use too far too often is?
Post-war socio-cultural democratisation. It's my rationale for everything.

Designer PETER SAVILLE, 'The 5-minute interview', *Independent*

Secreted and metachanically recovered field notes from sublaminal otherworlds. This is strictly a patagraphic hauntography of proto-mantic motherworlds. Mysteriograms of toposonic radiances are deconstructed and raptoluminal resonances at residual numinophilic nemeta sites are reiterated in the mycoboreal precincts of the shekinathrone...*[continues]*

Press release advertising 'Infernal Methods', live music and performances curated by NORMAN SHAW, Dundee

Pseuds Corporate

Dear Mrs Hambrook,

I would like to let you know about some changes that affect preparations for your flight with us.

These changes form part of our plans to create the best possible airport experience for air travellers ahead of our move into Heathrow Airport's Terminal 5 in 2008.

A letter from British Airways announcing the redesign of its check-in areas

A totem pole is now being erected in the middle of the HR department at the Bromley HQ, symbolising the place of the customer at the heart of the business.

From an article in *People Management* describing the transformation of the Human Resources function at Royal Bank of Scotland Insurance

CONTRIBUTORS: Nick Parker, Nick Slater, David Price, Colin Brown, Alex Palmer, Sinclair Curdie, Kerstin Hambrook, Mike Keedwell.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

DEFENCE SPECIAL

SPENDING

Sweet FA from BAE

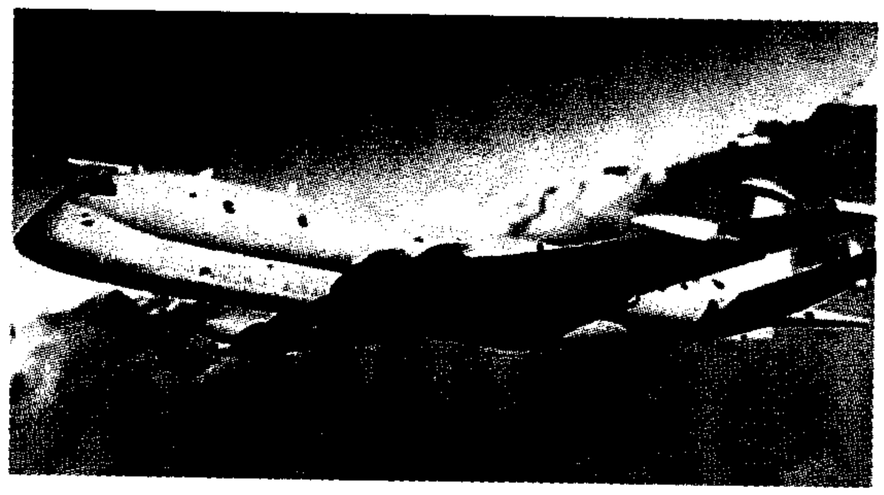
ANOTHER year, another bad "Major Projects Report" from the National Audit Office for the Ministry of Defence's favourite contractor, BAE Systems.

The latest review shows that BAE is the prime contractor on the three projects running most over-budget: Nimrod maritime reconnaissance aircraft (£700m over its £2.8bn budget and 7½ years late – pictured); Astute submarine (£1bn over a £2.6bn budget and 3½ years late); and Type 45 destroyers (£635m over a £5.5bn budget and two years late). And let's not forget the £17bn Eurofighter-Typhoon jet that can fly at twice the speed of sound – or could if it weren't already five years late. The cost over-runs on this project are so horrendous they can only be estimated due to "commercial confidentiality".

Despite this record and ongoing corruption inquiries into the company, BAE remains a leading member of the MC3 consortium bidding to take over all military engineering and communications training – one half of the defence training PFI deal. On such private sector operators will the capability of the UK's armed forces depend for decades to come.

There is nothing new in army contractors delivering massive cost over-runs and long waits. But the NAO did throw light on one new area by describing the performance of military private finance initiatives which were supposed to transform the procurement process by getting military systems in on time and under budget. With the "risks" transferred to the contractor, in theory the private companies should bear the cost of lateness and higher prices. In practice the armed forces are so committed to these massive projects that as soon as the supplying firms say they are in trouble, they are bailed out. In fact, says the NAO report, PFI projects are just as likely to get extra cash and cause long delays as the old-style purchases.

BAE is not the only culprit. Take the 1997 "Future Strategic Tanker" PFI project to replace and update Britain's air-to-air refuelling aircraft, some of the UK's most important warplanes. They are active in Iraq keeping both British and American fighters and bombers in the air. But



the fleet is old and desperately needs replacing. Ten years on, there is still no final contract.

The NAO reveals that "after a competition and several years of complex PFI negotiations", a consortium led by EADS was picked as "preferred bidder" in 2005 – yet there is still no fixed date for the arrival of the planes. The negotiations may be complex because the contractors have a distinct advantage: their main competitor, Boeing, stopped being a serious contender when a similar American contract collapsed in a corruption scandal. Now EADS and Co are the only game in town, they can put considerable pressure on the MoD. As the Air Force needs the planes urgently, it is in no position to squeeze the contractor.

EADS are also involved in another big PFI scheme: providing a satellite service for the British army called Skynet. This contract involves running the British army's current communication satellites and launching two new ones into space to orbit until 2018. A key part of the deal, says the NAO, was that EADS was supposed to take out insurance in case one of the satellites didn't launch or fell out of the sky. But the insurance market regarded the project as too volatile.

This failure to secure insurance should have been EADS's problem, but the army needs its satellites so badly that the MoD agreed when EADS said it would instead build and launch extra satellites to provide "physical insurance" in lieu of financial insurance. Instead of being able to reclaim £250m from EADS for its failure, the MoD instead has to pay EADS up to £885m more for the extra satellites.

P.F.I.

They've been Twigged

THE dismal logic behind the £19bn defence training PFI scheme, for which the lucky "preferred bidders" are expected to be announced next week, can now be exposed.

Asked by the *Eye* to explain a parliamentary answer from Defence Minister Derek Twigg that a PFI deal was the only affordable option for defence training, the MoD trotted out the standard defence that "under an off-balance sheet PFI, the capital construction costs… are spread over the lifetime of the project" instead of being "expended up front in the early years". The response ignores the fact that the PFI company passes on its interest costs to the taxpayer in annual charges so that PFI in fact ends up costing more than public funding. Even the Treasury now accepts this, relying on more subtle– if equally spurious–justifications for PFI.

The answer in fact betrays the real reason the increasingly discredited PFI has been chosen: to flatter the government's borrowing figures, even if it costs more and means taking the, er, imaginative step of privatising all defence training. The MoD has therefore refused to entertain an "in-house" bid that staff believe could have generated significant savings. Twigg now refuses to meet the unions.

Parliament has been largely silenced by the MoD's divide-and-conquer strategy in which the rival bidders have pitted regions – notably the West Midlands and South Wales – against each other. The few MPs to have shown any interest have mostly lobbied for the bid that favours their area, rather than jeopardise their region's chances by questioning whether allowing some very suspect companies to control defence training for at least 15 years is such a good idea. The only objections have come from Tory MP for The Wrekin Mark Pritchard, who called the plan a "privatisation too far", while Labour's John McDonnell has put down a series of early day motions urging the government to allow an in-house bid.

Whichever bidders win the two deals on offer, thousands of defence training jobs will switch across the country. Indicative ballots, however, suggest that over 70 percent of staff affected will not move with them, leaving the private companies short of skilled trainers just when the armed forces need them most.

It's an MoD world

MARINE SERGEANT Stephen Brown of 45 Commando, fighting in southern Afghanistan, is a brave man in more ways than one.

In October his fellow Marine, Gary Wright, aged 21, was killed when a suicide bomber attacked a patrol in one of the now notoriously vulnerable "Snatch" Land Rovers in the town of Lashkar Gar. Sergeant Brown was so angry at the ludicrously inadequate equipment with which his men are expected to confront a ruthless enemy that he stepped out of line to express his anger to a journalist, Matthew Hickley of the *Daily Mail*. For a start, he said, they were in desperate need of some proper patrol vehicles. Some 30 British soldiers have now been killed in Afghanistan and Iraq patrolling in Snatch Land Rovers, which offer no protection against mines, roadside bombs or suicide bombers. Yet every other nation's front-line troops, US, Canadian, Dutch and German, have now been equipped with a range of properly mine-protected vehicles, which have already saved many lives.

Sergeant Brown was even more vocal about the lack of Vipir infra-red thermal imaging equipment. In a war against suicide bombers this is absolutely vital because it enables a soldier to pick up at once, day or night, whether someone nearby is concealing a bomb. The image of hidden explosives shows up as a "cold spot" through the lenses, which can be used either as a rifle sight or, hand-held, on their own. Sergeant Brown's company had been supplied with only three Vipir sights, and they are in desperate need of 25. Didn't Tony Blair, after all, recently give his personal pledge that our troops would be given all the equipment they asked for?

When Brown's plea was published, it was quickly picked up by other journalists, although they all copied the *Mail*'s error of calling these infra-red devices "Vipers", betraying that they didn't really know what they were talking about.

No one fell into this trap more completely, however, than Shaun Ley of the BBC's *World At One*, who was given the chance to raise the issue with Lord Drayson, the businessman who was rather mysteriously given a peerage and appointed defence procurement minister shortly after he had given large sums of money to the Labour Party (and a lucrative contract for his company into the bargain). When Ley challenged Drayson on Brown's plea for more Vipirs, the minister smugly replied, "we've sent over 1,400 sets of night vision goggles to Afghanistan", as if this was an answer to the question. In fact it was an outrageous evasion. Night vision goggles, which work by intensifying an image in the dark, work on a wholly different principle. They don't work in daylight and are useless for picking up suicide bombers.

But so hopelessly ignorant was the BBC's fearless presenter that he did not notice Drayson's sleight of hand. "So far as you're concerned," he fatuously replied, "there's no shortage?". "No there isn't," replied the weaselly Drayson, doubtless hugely relieved at having been so easily let off the hook.

So ministers continue to lie, and get away with it. British soldiers continue to die. And a Marine's bravery in speaking out of turn, in a desperate bid to save his comrades' lives, becomes just another little piece of journalistic flotsam, floating away with the wind.

JAIL DEATH

Black Day

THE parents of a police and prison informant found dead in his cell met Prisons Minister Gerry Sutcliffe on 28 November to ask why the official investigation contained serious omissions, and why vital evidence about the last few days of his life was not presented at the inquest.

Andy and Pauline Day, from Essex, are calling for an independent inquiry into their son's treatment at the hands of the authorities - a call supported by the former chief inspector of prisons, Lord Ramsbotham.

Paul Day, 31, was nearing the end of an eight-year sentence for attempted robbery when he was found hanged in his cell in the segregation unit of Frankland prison, Durham, on 2 October 2002. He had acted as an informant in a number of cases, including, he said, that of Michael Stone, whose conviction for murder is now being reviewed by the Criminal Cases Review Commission.

The first Prison Service investigation into Day's death was judged so poor that the deputy director of the Prison Service, Peter Atherton, had to commission another one. When he received that, Atherton commissioned a third report - this time into Day's treatment at other prisons.

In the run-up to his death, Day had been taking part in England's longest ever dirty protest, sparked off, according to other prisoners, by bullying from staff. In the days before the five-week inquest – one of the longest ever into a death in custody – the family's legal team asked the Prison Service for copies of video evidence related to Day, but were told that the tapes no longer existed. Then, during the hearing, after one prisoner said in evidence he had been beaten "black and blue" by prison staff on the night Day died, the tapes were miraculously "found". They showed, among other things, Day being strip-searched by several prison officers in riot gear shortly before he died. The governor of Frankland, Phil Copple, was forced to apologise to the court for not "finding" the tapes sooner.

The inquest jury concluded that Day was driven to kill himself because prison staff did nothing to stop other prisoners abusing him, and because of other systemic failures in his care.

Then, earlier this year, the Days uncovered letters that showed their son had been visited by a solicitor six days before his death. At the meeting, Day had told Michael Gibson of Newcastle-based David Gray Solicitors that he wanted to retract false statements he had given in several cases.

In a letter to Day dated 1 October 2002, Gibson wrote: "You say you provided false evidence in court on several occasions... You wish to right the wrong suffered by various people against whom you made false statements." Gibson advised him he could either hand himself in to police or make a formal complaint to the chief constables of the relevant forces. He also told his client that he could write to the men's solicitors to expose the part he had played. He warned Day that he could face prosecution for perverting the course of justice. Gibson is now believed to be the last person outside the prison system to see Day alive.

The coroner, Andrew Tweddle, described this discovery as a "glaring omission" and said that an explanation should be provided by the Prison Service or HMP Frankland. "It certainly does seem very strange... that the visit does not seem to have been recorded in any of the paperwork that I have seen and further that this fact was not mentioned by any of the witnesses at the inquest," he told Day's parents.

The Days complained and the Prison Service launched an investigation. Atherton later conceded that the reports had failed to mention the visit - but could not explain why. He told them that the "only evidence of this visit" was a one-page daily occurrence log from the segregation unit where Day was being held, but added: "I am unable, after the passage of so much time, to know why the investigators either did not notice the reference to the visit or did not include it in their reports."

Atherton denied that the information had been deliberately withheld, and told them: "The segregation unit daily occurrence logs were... made available to your legal representatives and to the coroner. It seems that no one noticed the reference to the visit. You may wish to refer back to the logs yourselves."

The two-page document was contained in 17 lever-arch files of evidence disclosed by the Home Office just weeks before the inquest began, in January last year. But when the parents read it, they were shocked to find that it showed that Atherton himself had visited the segregation unit where Day was held, accompanied by Copple, the governor, on the same day as the visit from Gibson – yet another fact that has never been disclosed.

At their meeting with the minister last month, the Days were told that Atherton had retired.

"We have put a list of detailed questions to the Prison Service about the treatment about our son, not least about the visit from Michael Gibson," said Pauline and Andy Day. "And we want answers about what really went on."

In May, the Treasury agreed to make a substantial payment plus legal costs to settle a civil claim over the death brought by Day's parents under the Human Rights Act. "But we still haven't got the truth," the Days said.

CONSERVATION

Rubble ahead

THOSE responsible for the hideous wall of chalk and rubble unlawfully erected along the crest of Sussex downland known as Telscombe Tye, supposedly in the name of conservation (see *Eyes passim*), have found a novel way around an enforcement notice to remove it.

Incredible as it may sound, they have submitted a planning application to dump even more tonnes of rubbish up there.

Eye readers will recall that in an effort to keep joy riders off the track that crosses the downs, the Sussex Downs Conservation Board (SDCB) commissioned the building of "bunds" – or mounds – on both sides. In some places, however, the bunding stood 5ft feet high and 15ft wide. Dumped within the recycled chalk (pictured) was a lot of hazardous building debris, including brick rubble, concrete, wire and asbestos.

It was a giant fly tip, cutting an ugly swathe across what was supposed to be an area of outstanding natural beauty. After a mass of local protest, the bunds were deemed to have been built without planning permission and their removal was ordered by East Sussex County Council.

One of the main objections to the waste bunding was the monstrous way the chalk mounds disrupted the sweep of the downland landscape. So Telscombe Town Council and the SDCB are suggesting the way round this is not to remove the bunds... but to raise the downland to the level of reformed bunds – effectively making it a landfill site.

According to their latest application and appeal against the enforcement notice, 20-ton lorries would dump in excess of 15,000 tonnes of waste on top of the 9,000 they illegally dumped up there to create the bunds in the first place. Too bad about all the flora and fauna that will be buried or the disruption to those who enjoy the Tye.

EMPIRE PROPERTIES

Seedy business

NO SOONER had *Eye* 1171 exposed the shady dealings of the men behind Ilford's proposed skyscraper, Pioneer Point, than the company behind it claimed to the *Ilford Recorder* that "everything is above board and it would be a disservice to the people and Ilford as a whole if this had any effect on Pioneer Point".

Really? The *Eye* has now seen evidence that crucial "seed money" put in by Empire last year before the bankers would take an interest was itself the proceeds of an earlier secretive offshore deal. Two years ago Empire set up a Jersey company called Myrtle Investments Ltd, administered by an offshore arm of British accountants Smith & Williamson called Langtry Trust, but really run by Empire bosses Hayden Chittell and Tom O'Donnell from their London offices. Myrtle snaffled up a disused light bulb factory in Spencer Hill Road, Wimbledon and, with the help of a well-connected planning consultant and some smart architects, quickly and profitably gained permission to convert the building into a health centre.

Hayden Chittell of Empire pictured with Councillor AlanWeinberg, head of regeneration at Ilford Council

The deal was financed by a close associate of the Empire bosses, former Wimpey Homes managing director Colin Beaumont-Smith (now a multi-millionaire Guernsey tax exile) and devised by Empire's offshore tax expert, Michael Woolley, a chartered accountant and former Wimpey finance director. Woolley practices as MJ Associates and at the time gave an address in Victoria that a spot of investigation revealed, appropriately enough, to be a façade with a demolition site behind it.

When the sale went through in January last year, Beaumont-Smith almost doubled his six-figure investment. But that still left over half a million pounds of profit to be disposed of. Whether the taxman received a cut is not known. Woolley wouldn't return the *Eye*'s call to discuss the deal.

Myrtle quickly lent the profits using a "promissory note" to yet another offshore company, this one set up in the British Virgin Islands by a London solicitor who advised the Guernsey-based administrators that "there will be a series of deals, all offshore". From BVI the funds were simply on-lent to the British company with the rights over Pioneer Point, Empire SPV Ltd.

The banks, thus reassured to see the colour of the developers' money (and having been lavishly entertained at an Empire-sponsored racing meeting at Goodwood), soon stumped up their millions to fund the project.

Pioneer Point, meanwhile, remains just a hole in the ground even though the company is understood to have sold £10 million worth of space "off plan" and has launched a big PR push to sell 260 apartments. It remains to be seen whether investors will be so keen to buy flats that don't yet exist when they learn that the brains behind the development, Tom O'Donnell, recently told a business associate, discussing a separate transaction, "I'll put my hands up and say it – I've had to do it for the last fifteen fucking years. I've lied, and I know when I've lied."

continued overleaf ➤

LEGAL NEWS

Rose thorns

THE sudden dropping of all drug charges against 42-year-old Gus O'Brien at Exeter crown court last month has renewed interest in the case of O'Brien's missing girlfriend, Charlotte Pinkney, 16.

Although Charlotte's body was never found, Nick Rose (pictured), 24, another man from the same West Country town of Ilfracombe, was convicted of her murder at Exeter crown court almost two years ago.

Rose, O'Brien and Charlotte had all been at a drugs party at a house in Slade, two miles outside the town, in the early hours of the morning on 28 February 2004. Rose had arrived in a friend's car and at about 4am had decided to drive back to the friend's house in Ilfracombe. Charlotte and wanother man, Dean Copp, asked if they could come with him. Rose dropped Copp off in Ilfracombe, but instead of returning the car, he and Charlotte started off back to the party.

That, according to the prosecution, was the last time anyone saw Charlotte alive. The prosecution's case was that Rose killed her, hid the body and later dumped it somewhere. Although there was no direct evidence against him, on the face of it there was a lot of circumstantial evidence: tiny blood spots matching hers were found in the car; he was seen to have scratches on his neck; and he was seen to be washing the car, both inside and out, the day after her disappearance. A bag similar to one Charlotte had owned was found near where Rose said the car had become stuck that night and a boot similar to hers was found near his home.

Rose maintained that when he arrived back at Slade, he saw police and, as he had no driving licence, he dropped Charlotte off at the Community Centre and hid the car up a rough track alongside Slade reservoirs. The car stalled and stuck in mud under a railway bridge. He scrambled up the embankment, scratching himself on brambles, and walked along the railway embankment to his parents' home in Ilfracombe. From then he had almost continuous alibis until his arrest on 7 March.

One hurdle for the prosecution was that in order to convict Rose, it needed to prove that Charlotte was dead by 6.30 that morning. But at Rose's trial there were three witnesses who said they had seen her alive hours later.

One was the landlord of Ilfracombe's Victoria pub, Brett Houlford. He said that Charlotte and O'Brien had spent some hours in his pub on the afternoon of 28 February. Charlotte had been sitting on Gus's knee and was very distressed about something. He was sure it was the 28th, because one of his regular customers, Ronald Townsend was drinking orange juice because he had to ferry his daughter from her birthday party that day at an Ilfracombe restaurant.

Mr Townsend said he also saw Charlotte on the 28th looking "wrecked". (He told the *Eye* he had difficulty in persuading two police officers to take his statement. One said to him: "You've thrown a right spanner in the works.")

The third witness was a 14-year-old boy, who said he was in no doubt about the date when he saw Charlotte in the street, because it was a Saturday two days after his birthday. He was wearing his new tracksuit which had been given to him as a present.

Their evidence clearly troubled the jury, which took 25 hours to convict and only then by a majority verdict. However, another man, postman Nick Perrin, came forward later to say that he too had seen Charlotte in the pub at about 2.20pm. He spotted her when he arrived by taxi. His evidence was central to Rose's recent appeal; but the appeal judges ruled that he may have confused the 28th with the 21st, when he was on a similar work shift. However, the previous week Charlotte and O'Brien had been seen watching a football match at a different pub in the town, and staff had apparently had to break down the lavatory door to recover Charlotte who had apparently passed out.

The appeal judges clearly decided that all these witnesses were mistaken – even though restaurant records show that Mr Townsend's family birthday party definitely did take place on the 28th. Lord Justice Tuckey commented that although he believed Mr Perrin an honest witness, he had been pressed to give evidence by Rose's grandmother, Doris Brown.

But if the defence witnesses were mistaken, little can be said in favour of the prosecution witnesses, most of whom were at the drugs party that night. Dean Copp is barred from pubs for violence.

O'Brien, under cross examination by Rose's barristers at Rose's murder trial, denied that he was a drug dealer and that Charlotte's death had been cocaine-related. When police had searched his flat they found a book in his possession, entitled *Changes after Death*, which had been given him by the artist Damien Hirst. A bookmark was in the chapter relating to death from an overdose.

O'Brien had told the court that he had not seen Charlotte leave the party that night, had never seen her afterwards and was not – as the landlord and others maintained – in the pub with her the next day.

Had Gus O'Brien's own recent trial gone ahead and he been convicted of drug dealing at Exeter last month, the credibility of his evidence at Rose's trial would have been thrown into doubt.

The Crown Prosecution Service was unable to say why the charges against him had been dropped; when he had been charged; or whether any Class A drugs had actually been found in his possession. A spokesman did say, however, that witnesses, some of whom were the same as at Rose's trial, were no longer willing to come forward.

Campbell Malone, the tenacious solicitor behind many infamous miscarriage of justice cases, including that of Stefan Kiszko, has now taken over the Rose case and is preparing a dossier for the Criminal Case Review Commission.

Legal Aid and a bet

EVEN though the consensus view is that the MMR debate is over, a handful of cases of alleged vaccine damage against the manufacturers are still working through the high court.

They concern children suffering conditions such as epilepsy and brain damage, transverse myelitis (an immune system disorder affecting the central nervous system) and deafness. Because these are all acknowledged, if rare, side effects of the triple vaccine, theirs were arguably the more straightforward claims against the vaccine manufacturers. However, they were forced to take a back seat for several years while the courts and the Legal Services Commission, which decides legal aid funding, prioritised the hundreds of autism and bowel disease cases.

However, even these straightforward cases are now struggling to stay in the fight because the families' legal aid has been withdrawn – even from one brain-damaged child whose family had already received a vaccine damage payment from the government. Only the two cases of transverse mylitis, after appeals, are so far guaranteed court funding.

Last week Jackie Fletcher, whose son Robert suffered a massive seizure 10 days after his MMR jab and now has brain damage and epilepsy, told the high court that she blamed her solicitors, Irwin Mitchell, for the withdrawal of legal aid. She said she had lodged a formal complaint about the "Top 10" firm with the Law Society.

She and other parents were in court to ask the judge, Mr Justice Keith, to resist attempts by the defendant drug companies to strike out the remaining MMR cases, and give the families more time to obtain funding. "I expected Irwin Mitchell to conduct Robert's case in a professional and competent manner," said Mrs Fletcher. "There have been major issues important to the running of Robert's case that I believe should have been handled differently."

Mrs Fletcher told the judge the law firm had, without her knowledge or presence, consulted four experts, none of whom appears to have written a report on Robert's case. Then, again without consultation, the firm informed the LSC that hers and the other cases could not proceed.

Had Mrs Fletcher known of the experts, she would have objected to two of them because of the potential for a conflict of interest. One was Prof Brent Taylor, who sits on the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation, which approved MMR, and another was Dr Stephen Conway, another paediatrician, who used to sit on the committee. It was Brent Taylor, an outspoken critic of Dr Andrew Wakefield and the MMR litigation, who apparently "drove the consensus of all the medical experts".

Mrs Fletcher said she asked for copies of the minutes of all meetings where Robert's case was discussed and was "shocked" to discover that only a couple of points were raised at a telephone conference where the only expert present seemed to be Dr Conway. "He actually stated that one of the points raised was beyond his expertise and a neurologist should be asked to comment on the point," she said. But no neurologist was ever consulted about a unique pattern of brain damage suffered by Robert.

The experts had adopted a template of four criteria that each child should meet before deciding whether each case could progress. "The template was very restrictive but even with this strict criteria Robert met the template so his case should have been allowed to progress," she said.

Mrs Fletcher told the court that while she accepted Irwin Mitchell's contention that the field of paediatric immunology was small, Richard Barr, the solicitor who first handled the case, had found "a comprehensive team" – including a neurologist Dr Marcel Kinsbourne. He had been consulted by a new firm of solicitors, Hodge Jones and Allen, which was now acting for some of the families, including hers. "These new clients, it should be noted, had lost their legal aid following Irwin Mitchell's experts' opinion but regained it following a successful legal aid Funding Review Committee hearing," she told the judge.

She said that in the absence of a report from Irwin Mitchell, she had obtained her own expert opinion from an American, Dr Edward Yazbak, a paediatrician and vaccine damage expert witness, which attributes Robert's brain damage and epilepsy to his MMR vaccination.

She said that she too, through Hodge Jones and Allen, has submitted a new application for legal aid to the Funding Review Committee. "I believe that any delay with the timetable of the court is of Irwin Mitchell's making and I would hope that as the parents had no control of this, the delay would not be held against the child's case."

Irwin Mitchell said it had investigated the cases thoroughly using "highly regarded expert witnesses" and determined that they "lacked merit", informing both clients and the LSC, after which funding was withdrawn. The firm said it was addressing complaints it had received, adding: "We do not accept that anything other than appropriate advice has been given."

The judge is expected to announce his decision about granting the families more time shortly.

In the City

UNNOTICED in the justified outrage over the Farepak collapse is the significance of the highly unusual situation of different receivers for the Christmas club subsidiary and its parent, European Home Retail (EHR).

Normally the administrator for the parent company automatically takes the same role in the subsidiaries because the bank making the appointment will have a charge over all group assets. But in the case of Farepak, PricewaterhouseCoopers were appointed at EHR while BDO Stoy Hayward was appointed to take the Farepak poisoned chalice.

That decision was taken by the High Court, presumably at the request of EHR following bankers HBOS's refusal to continue its support. BDO were appointed administrative receivers for Farepak which, EHR stated, resulted in PwC being appointed its receiver and manager by HBOS under an existing 2000 debenture.

Insolvency experts suggest this indicates that from the beginning it was accepted that there was a potential conflict of interest between EHR and its bankers and Farepak and its 150,000 unprotected savers whose £40m had been used as a piggy bank – first by EHR for working capital, and then by HBOS to repay its loans.

An immediate reason for such a conflict is that PwC had been advising HBOS on how to deal with the looming crisis within EHR for several months before they were called in as administrators in early October. PwC would therefore have been well informed on the continuing use of Farepak customers' deposits by EHR for every purpose other than providing vouchers for Christmas presents. They would also have been fully aware that the deposits were not ringfenced and that HBOS, according to the EHR directors, had refused to protect the Farepak savers in that way. This raises the interesting possibility whereby, on behalf of all creditors, especially as HBOS has been significantly repaid, BDO Stoy Hayward could bring claims against those further up the corporate food chain responsible for hoovering up Farepak's cash.

The continued soliciting and accepting of Farepak deposits could come back to bite the EHR directors headed by the unlovable Sir Clive Thompson and chief executive William Rollason. But it also points the finger firmly at HBOS and its advisors.

EHR (and soon HBOS and PwC) knew that both it and Farepak were in trouble from February 2006 when Choice Gift Vouchers collapsed following the failure of another Christmas club company, Family Hampers. The High Street stores that accepted savers' vouchers changed the basis on which the scheme operated. The stores demanded payment for the vouchers up-front. This meant that instead of EHR having the use of Farepak's money well into the New Year, they would now have to pay before the vouchers were issued in October.

But EHR continued to suck money out of Farepak, which continued to encourage its agents to collect from customers. Both sets of directors must have known that the presents for which the customers were handing over their savings could now only be bought if HBOS put up more money. And that the bank was increasingly reluctant to do, presumably on the advice of PwC. Farepak was the only substantial source of cash and that cash was legally not required to be ring-fenced so HBOS and PwC did not take any steps to encourage EHR and Farepak to stop taking new money even though the Christmas club savers were being deceived. HBOS would protect its position, PwC would get paid but the Farepak customers were likely to get nothing.

The HBOS argument – based no doubt on PwC advice – would be that if Farepak had stopped accepting cash because it could not guarantee the vouchers would be issued the music would have immediately stopped and EHR would have collapsed.

By July EHR was telling shareholders it needed to "substantially" increase its borrowings. But it still continued to drum up Farepak business. In late August with the financial position deteriorating EHR shares were suspended. Again it continued – like the Ponzi scheme operator who knows that without new money the scam will end and the police investigation begin – to encourage savers to hand over their money. Lest we forget, this is the very rich exploiting the very poor.

So money continued to arrive at Farepak and be sent onwards to EHR until October when the game ended and HBOS cleaned out whatever was left to repay its loans. The bank then belatedly made a £2m donation to the Farepak victims' fund in a bid to fend off growing criticism of its behaviour. There is no evidence of any donation from PwC.

The actions of HBOS and PwC as well as the EHR directors will be the focus of the investigation by the Department of Timidity & Inaction. Also BDO Stoy Hayward is required by law to report to the DTI within six months on the conduct of the Farepak directors.

One qualification for "unfit conduct" leading to disqualification of directors is the mishandling of customers' deposits taken without goods being delivered. Unfit conduct does not simply require the company to have accepted deposits when insolvent. "There must be some evidence that the failure was not excusable", declares the Insolvency Service guidelines. "Was the company using deposits for its general trading purposes at a time when orders were not being met on time, so that the company was jeopardizing deposits without realistic prospect of delivering the goods or services or being able to repay deposits?" Farepak victims would say the answer was a resounding "yes" from July, if not earlier.

The DTI and BDO could well also look closely at EHR chairman Sir Clive Thompson as being a "shadow" director of Farepak in that he, along with the other main board directors, were giving the orders which resulted in the Farepak money being used for other purposes. Decisions seemingly encouraged if not enforced by HBOS and its advisors PwC.

The defences will be that there was no legal requirement to ring-fence the Farepak deposits; Christmas clubs are unregulated and, anyway, all the ultimate bad decisions were taken by Thompson and his fellow directors. They ran EHR/Farepak, not us, is the HBOS mantra. But the directors no doubt will claim they had an HBOS gun at their heads – put there with the aid of PwC.

Hopefully the High Court and creditors' committee will ensure BDO Stoy Hayward acts on behalf of all creditors and not to protect EHR, HBOS or PwC. Especially as the court has agreed that there will be no Farepak creditors meeting, due to the large number of creditors represented by the Christmas club victims. Why, otherwise, have separate administrators?

WORD from the world of corporate spookery is that control of Diligence, the outfit whose European boss is now former Tory leader Michael Howard, may be about to change hands.

It is rumoured that a controlling stake could be acquired by Nat Rothschild, son and heir to Lord Jake the Snake. Both Rothschilds, like Diligence, do a lot of Russian oligarch business. Nat is close to Rusal's Oleg Deripaska and his friend Roman Abramovich, and Lord Jake to the former Yukos directors. Diligence is currently engaged for Alfa's Mikhail Fridman in his battle over Megafon which has exposed Putin ally and telecoms minister Leonid Reiman to charges of corruption and secret ownership.

FURTHER evidence – if that was required by Yates of the Yard – of the "soft" rather than "commercial" nature of the Labour Party's secret loans is provided by the latest report from the Electoral Commission.

Non-commercial loans are donations and have to be disclosed. None of the £12m in Labour loans last year were disclosed until the peerages for four lenders were rejected on the phony basis that they were "commercial".

The generous interest terms and no security already question the real "commercial" nature of

See over ☞

THE DIRECTORS

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WE ARE, AT LAST, RESPONDING TO THE THREAT OF GLOBAL WARMING ...
... BY FINDING CONSTANTLY CHANGING, CREATIVE WAYS ...
... OF DOING NOTHING ABOUT IT!

the loans. But so do the shuffling of repayment dates and other arrangements since details first emerged in the Labour Party accounts in July and the party's first report to the commission in August.

The "loans" were originally for six to 12 months according to the party accounts. There has never been any disclosure of a six-month "loan". Instead they now stretch as far away as 2009. And most repayment dates have either been extended or not met for the same reason – can't pay, won't pay. Strong evidence that these were never ever "loans" but intended/expected donations.

Take the £2m from clothing tycoon Richard Caring. The latest loan report shows that this was agreed on June 25 this year – five days before the 2005 party accounts were agreed. The fact that there was no mention of any loans in the 2004 accounts is a focus of the police investigation as evidence of deception. But the 2005 accounts stated "a further commercial loan of £2m was received from Richard Caring in March 2006". So why the need to enter into a presumed new agreement on 25 June? Repayment is in 2008.

Caring is a close associate of stockbroker Barry Townsley who, it now emerges, was the first would-be peer to open his chequebook – for £1m on 13 April 2005, shortly before the last general election. Townsley is close to Labour's key fundraiser, Lord Levy. Back in August the Commission was told the Townsley loan was to be repaid in October 2007. Now it has been extended to April 2008.

Fellow former Labour donor, software millionaire Gordon Crawford, loaned £500,000 on the same day. This was due on 29 August this year. It was not repaid and Crawford was said to be pressing for repayment, but this is now said to be "indefinite". Still pressing is Sir Chris Evans, the biotechnology millionaire. He loaned £1m on 31 May. This was due for repayment on 30 November. The test of corporate insolvency is not being able to repay debts as and when they fall due!

Labour's biggest donor, Lord Sainsbury, ponyed up £2m on 18 April last year. His repayment date has been extended from July to September 2007. The next day property developer Sir David Garrard – another peer wannabe – loaned £2.3m, largest of the secret loans. His repayment date of April 2007 has not been changed – so far. A month later, after the election, Andrew Rosenfeld, Garrard's long-time partner in the Minerva property group but not a previous disclosed Labour donor, made a £1m loan. This still has a 2009 repayment date.

Sir Gulam Noon, another would be peer, loaned £250,000 on 30 April 2005. That is due in October next year. Healthcare entrepreneur Chai Patel made his £1.5m loan on 20 July. This was due on 7 August this year. He has extended repayment for a year, despite not getting his peerage.

City trader Derek Tullett, a long-time Labour donor, loaned £400,000 on 5 September last year. This was due on 31 October 2006. It has been extended until September 2007. Businessman Nigel Morris made a £1m loan on 25 September 2005. This was due on 30 September last. It has been extended by a year. Former Crapita chairman Rod Aldridge has kindly split his £1m loan made on 4 October 2005 into two parts, so that instead of the £1m due on 30 September half is now due in December 2008 and the rest in October 2009.

That none of these "commercial" loans has been repaid on the due date confirms they were always expected to be converted into donations because Labour could never afford the repayments. That suggests a breach of the 2000 Political Parties, Elections & Referendums Act. The fact that four of those generous lenders were also then nominated for peerages brings in the sale of honours.

Possible charges could include conspiracy to contravene one or other or both laws. The most obvious targets are Levy and the four would-be peers, plus former party treasurer Matt Carter, whose duty it was to disclose the loans to the party auditors and the Electoral Commission.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 328

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 14 December 2006

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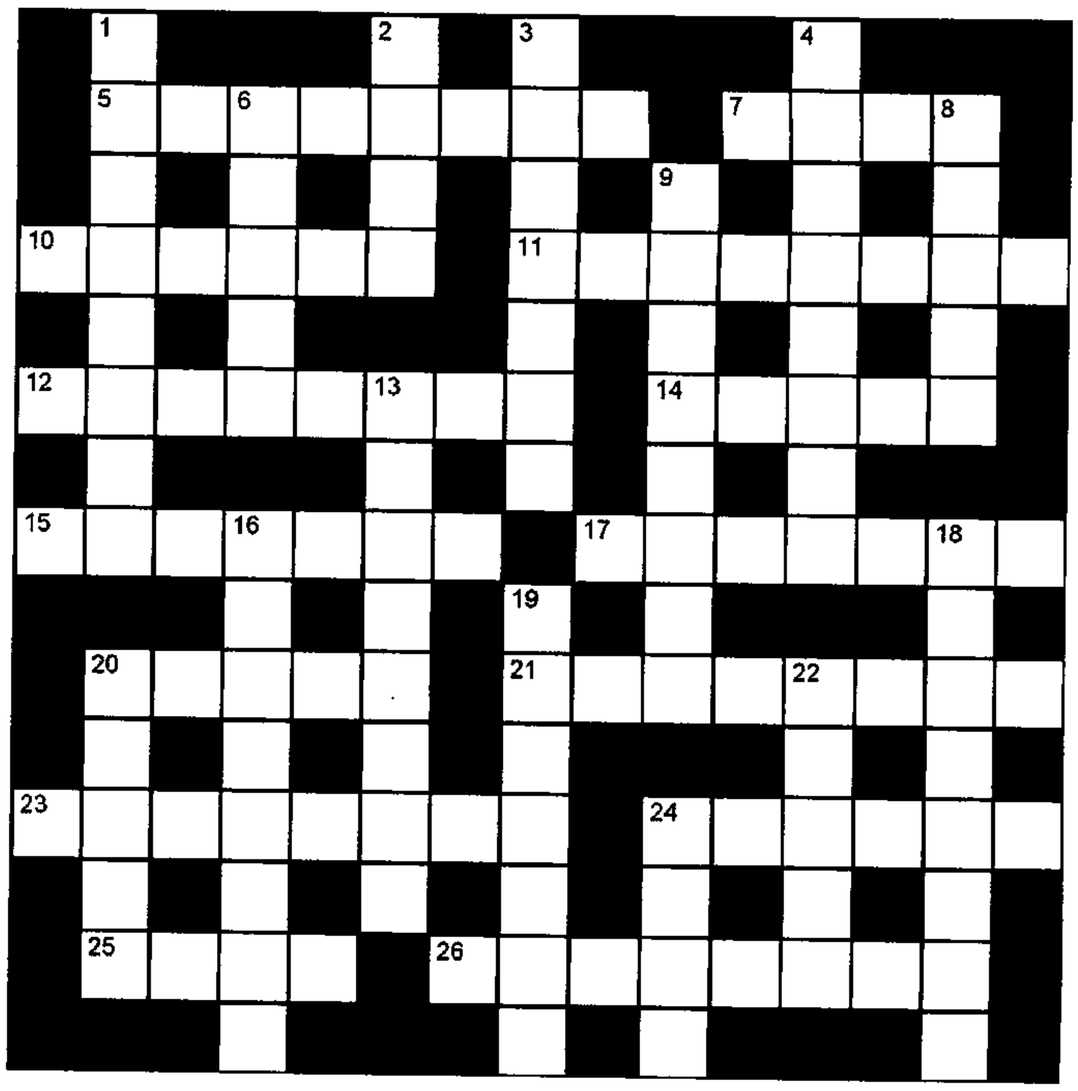


ACROSS

5/12/14/16/20dn./22 Tabloid editor's advice: "At no time rent the *Pravda* block with a cracking floor!" (5,3,3,5,3,2,3,3,2,1,4,5)

7 See 25ac.

10 Tarzan needs to take piss (cut short) in one-piece (6)

11 Larynx, organ and balls protector (5,3)

12 See 5ac.

14 See 5ac.

15 Bill's monumental erection captivating model (7)

17 Come by nuzzling blue duck (3,4)

20 Old president in the morning at right angles to sailor's length (5)

21 Having an erection to dispose of the insistent rep's delivery (4,4)

23 PM à la Brown? Horrendous! (5,3)

24 Like the stand-offish type responsible for an obnoxious leak? (6)

25/7 Read odd novel about page and become stiff (4,4)

26 Not broken in, organ? Dead mad-looking (4-4)

DOWN

1 Picture of crack plugged (8)

2 Organisation disarmed (it says) by new perceived threat to USA? (4)

3 Old sailor's ejaculation gets lover's rejection (5-2)

4 One would have to leave, had a shit changed sides (8)

6 Sick of head from Veronica? Leave it out! (5)

8 Get dead in the water Gordon to replace his leader (5)

9 Tragic royal family, on lager, pissed (4,4)

13 Inopportune, getting nut crushed by frantic Emily (8)

16 See 5ac.

18 Flapping old towel and rolling in it (4-2-2)

19 Who's swinging, swinging both ways? The last character in the luvvie thing (7)

20 See 5ac.

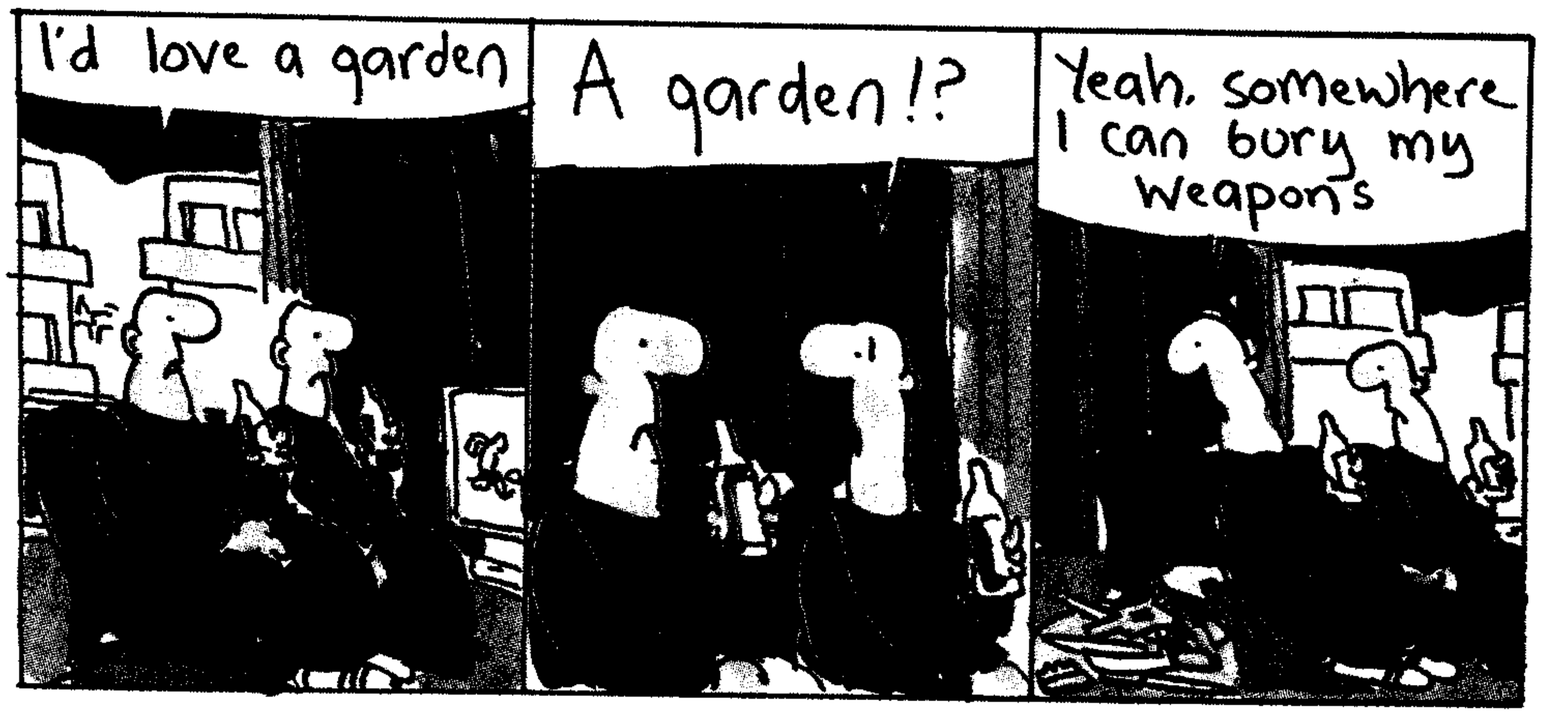
24 Funny Mr James secures the end of Conservative Right, perhaps? (4)

Crossword 327 winner: A. WILLSON

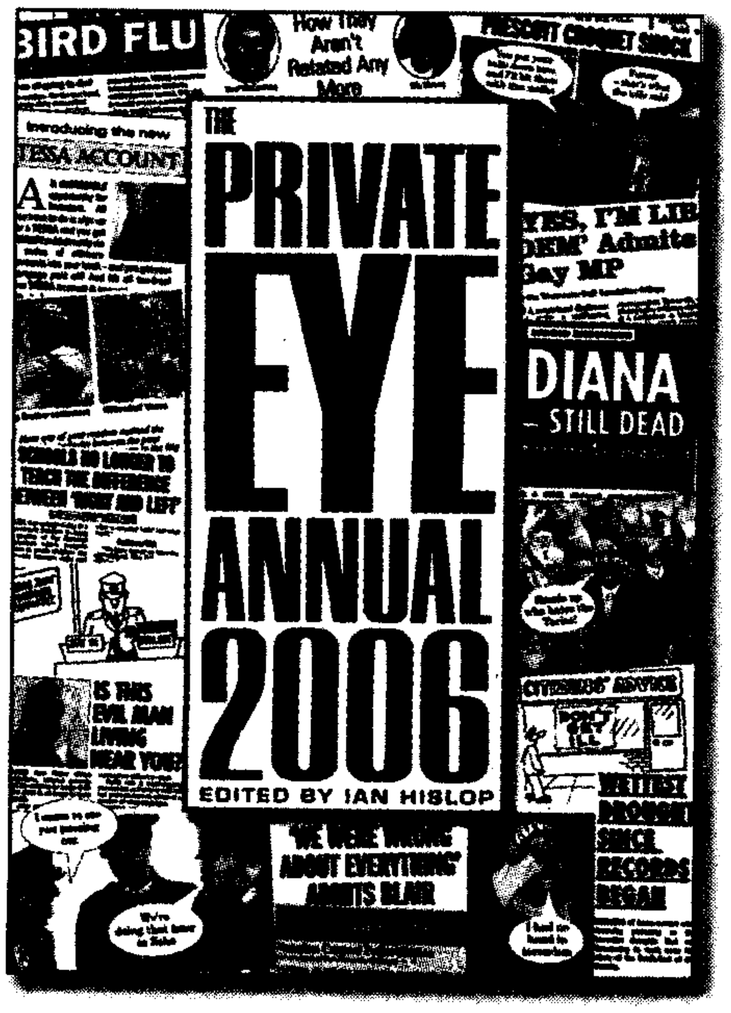
ACROSS: 8 Screw you 9 Oboist 10 Polish plumbers 11 Slag 12 Private Eye 13 Cognac 15 Insult 18 Castrating 20 Tory 21 A pain in the arse 23 Jackal 24 Feminist.

DOWN: 1 Acapulco 2 Jetlag 3 Ayes 4 Bumpkin 5 Copulating 6 Cobblers 7 Astray 12 Peccadillo 14 Nitpicks 16 Largesse 17 Lift-off 19 Appeal 20 Tyrant 22 Emmy.

HUSBAND



PRIVATE EYE'S CHRISTMAS BOOKS


BIRD FLU
How They Aren't Related Any More
THE PRIVATE EYE ANNUAL 2006
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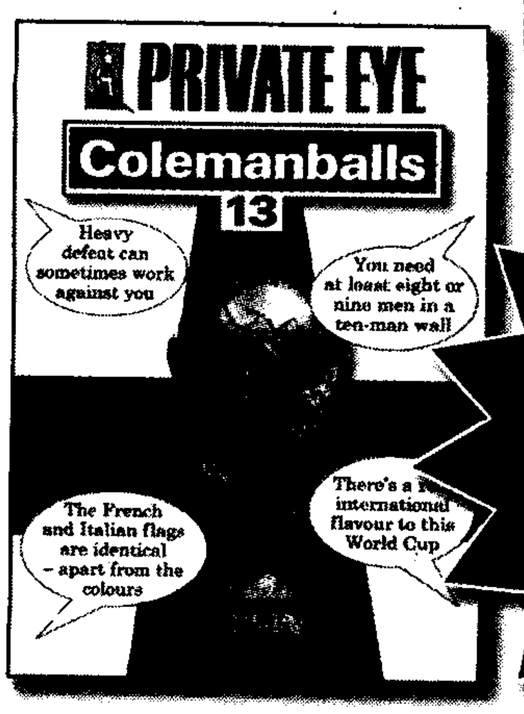
PRIVATE EYE
Colemanballs 13
Heavy defeat can sometimes work against you
You need at least eight or nine men in a ten-man wall
The French and Italian flags are identical – apart from the colours
There's a[n] international flavour to this World Cup

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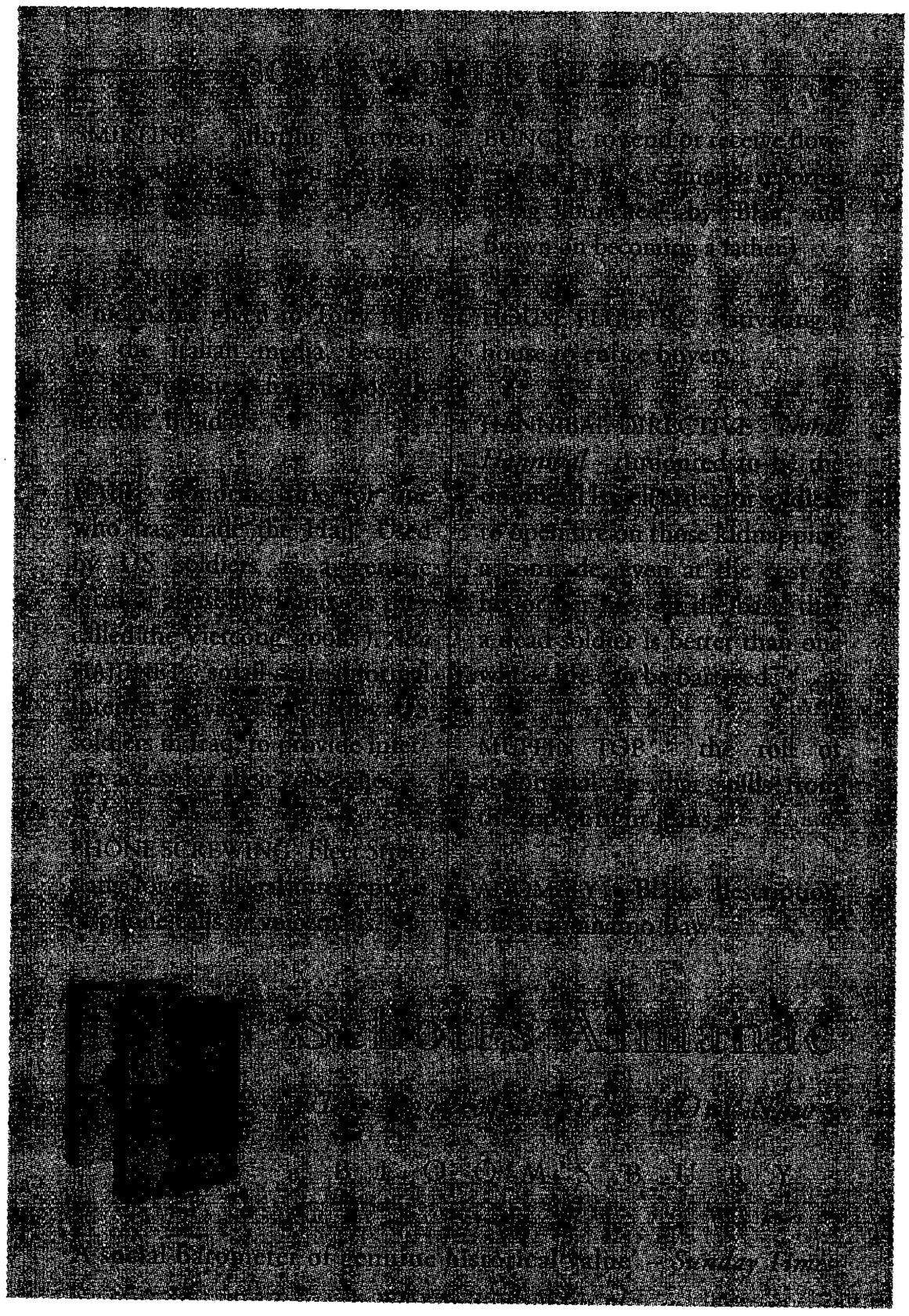

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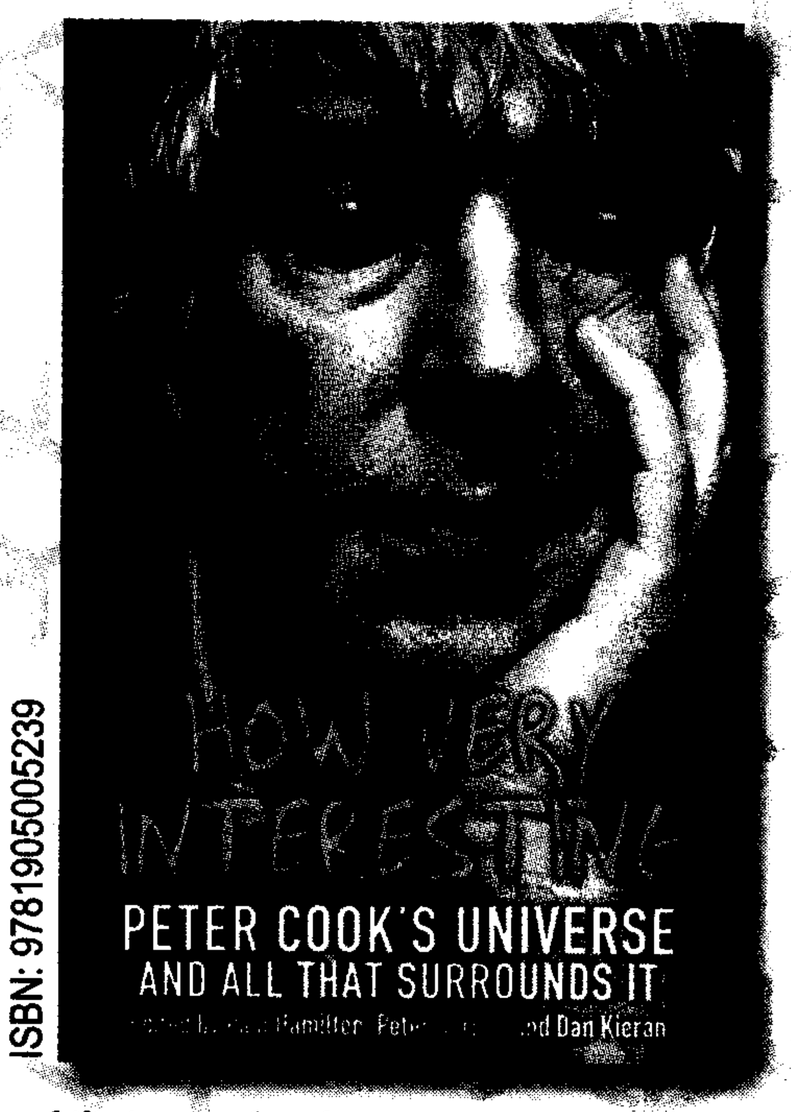

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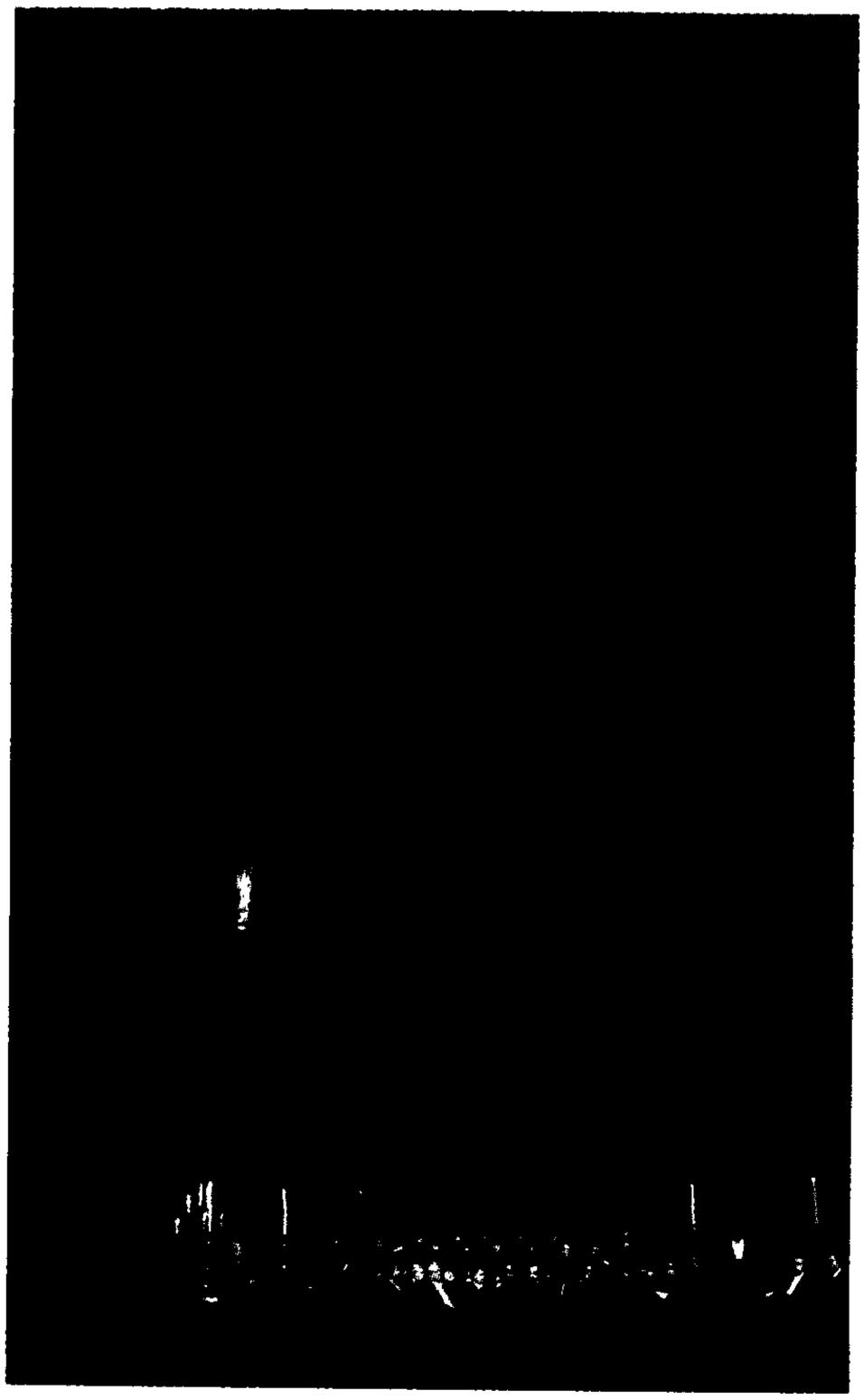

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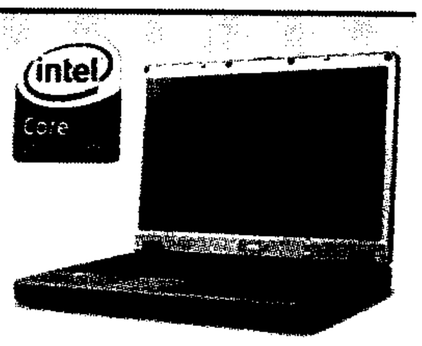

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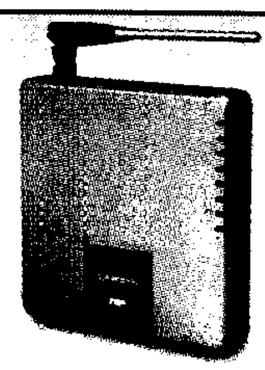

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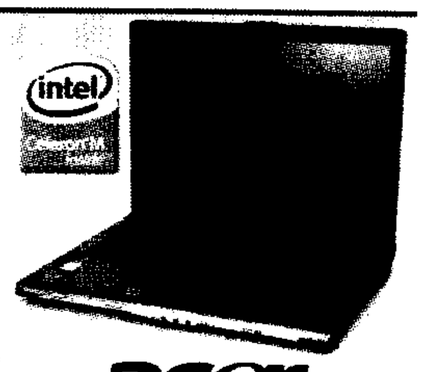

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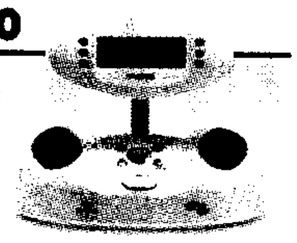

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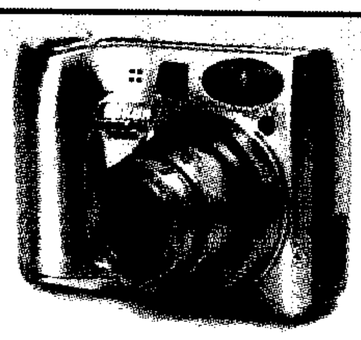

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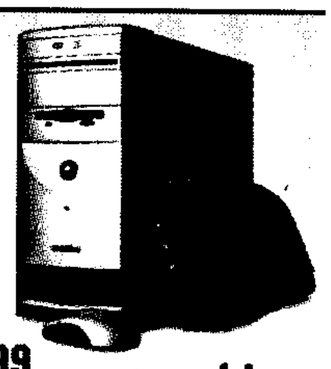

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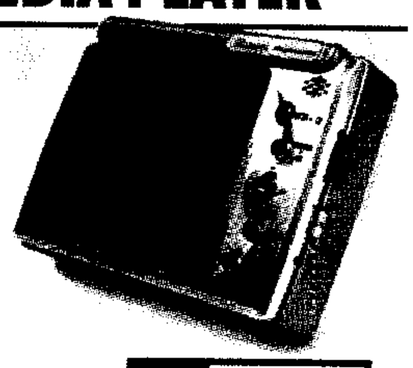

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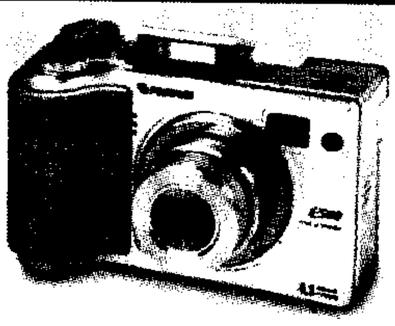

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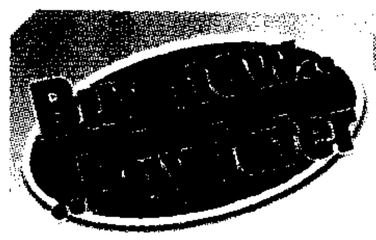

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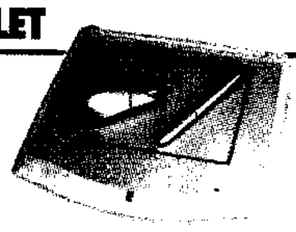

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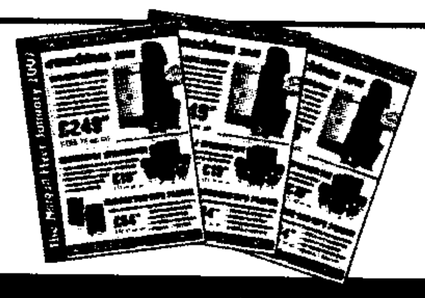

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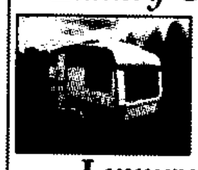

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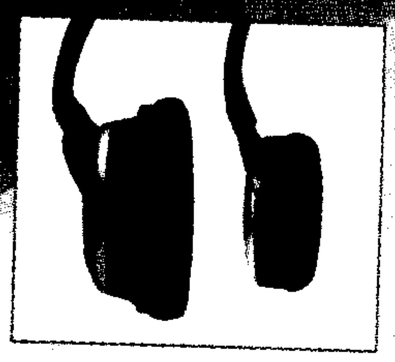

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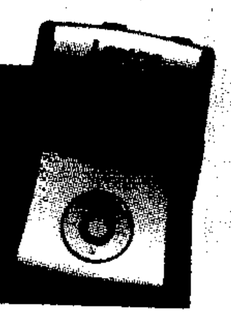

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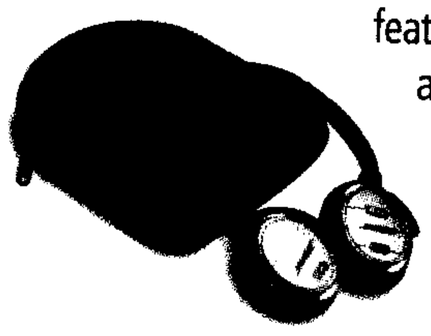

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